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## Book Review: Field notes on Democracy

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### INTRODUCTION

Around every literary work, there are some attributes of law. Law governs us, provides us with remedies in case of violation, and all these legal aspects are there in society due to democracy. We as a society believe that democracy is the best option available to us to safeguard our human rights. Democracy is not the perfect concept, but it is a choice of us as a society because it is one of the best options available to us. “Is there life after democracy, we will look, that what will happen if democracy is used up? What will happen if it is hallowed out and emptied out of its meaning”. (Roy, 2001) Then, we will look at some of the circumstances where this happened, and blatant violation of human rights within democracy took place. Our voice can often be the cause of change; that is what the book stands for. The book's title is one of the essays in the book, which Arundhati Roy wrote after the assassination of Hrant Dink, a journalist who raised his voice, had written and spoken about the Armenian genocide, which the Turkey government denies. The book was a source of the government investigation and the rise of fascism in our country. This book is a compilation of versatile essays written by Arundhati Roy. Politics is often a form of debate, but this research paper will analyze different essays ranging from issues such as democracy, riots to India becoming a

nuclear country. The researcher will also dwell on the bombings of September 11, 2001, and will give us an idea that the bombings of the enemy country also come under the act of terror to the world at large. The author in the book has put forth the idea that words such as progress and development are used as synonyms to economic reforms, which is actually not the case. The researcher will also do the analysis of the 2002 February Godhra riots, where a train coach of around 200 people was burned alive, and the Gujarat government, just like a bystander, stood and watched when there were riots taking place. The researcher will see, how in the name of having peace in our country, the government enacted the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), which was been notified in ten states. A mere glance at this act will give you an idea of how undemocratic, draconian act it is. To put in the words of Arundhati Roy, this act is a tool to harass and terrorize its own people. The researcher will analyze how the displacement of tribals has taken place due to the Sardar Sarovar dam. The Adivasis and tribals, who are already one of the most vulnerable in our demography, the development projects have pushed them into malaise. The so-called projects, which affect the land use, forests, mountains, water flow, can only be termed as ecocide.

Arundhati Roy criticizes the Supreme court's judgment, which granted the death penalty to Mohammad Afzal, one of the convicts in the 2001 Parliament attack. She criticizes the death penalty, as it does not act as a deterrent. She says that Afzal Guru is one of the pawns, and he is not the dragon but is the dragon footprint, and if we kill the footprint, we will never get to know who the actual dragon was/is? However, regrettably, there is no quick fix; these human rights violations will take place in a democracy unless and until we learn from them and feel mortified for what we did and did not do.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Arundhati Roy is best known for his award-winning novel "The God of Small Things" and his commitment to the environment and conservation. An Indian writer, actress, and political activist, she supports the causes of human rights. She wrote many books and even directed movies. She has always been a critic of the voice of right-wing parties. She sometimes writes about topics in the news. She was one of the few who opposed the death penalty for Afzal

Guru. She has vehemently opposed the building of Sardar Sarovar Dam and the change in citizenships rules in 2019. Roy was involved in a variety of environmental and human rights causes, frequently clashing with Indian legal authorities and the country's middle-class establishment. She was chastised for her outspoken support for Maoist-backed Naxalite insurgency groups, which she summarised in the book “Walking with the Comrades” (2011). While Roy was leading efforts to stop the construction of Narmada dams, supporters of the project accused her of assaulting them during a protest in 2001. Despite the fact that the charges were dropped, she was found guilty of contempt of court the following year after her petition to dismiss the charges offended Supreme Court judges with its vituperative tone. She was fined and sentenced to one day in jail.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

“The algebra of Infinite Justice”, by Arundhati Roy, this book is a compilation of essays. The book covers a broad and extensive range of topics, including India's elation over nuclear bomb tests, the ecological impression of public works projects, and foreign multinational corporations' influence on policy in poorer countries. “Understanding Gujarat Violence”, by Ashutosh Varshney, this article explains how the Gujarat riot began by burning a train and following events. Hindu-Muslim riots are common in India, but the Gujarat violence reached new heights of horror and brutality, earning it a double meaning. “Hindu-Muslim riots are common in India, but the Gujarat violence reached new heights of horror and was unmistakably a pogrom, wrote Ashutosh Varshney” (Varshney, 2002). As written precisely “it was a crushing embarrassment for anyone who believes in the pluralistic core of Indian nationhood, a view enshrined in the country's constitution, giving equal weight to all religions in the country, with none being prioritized. “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence”, by Asghar Ali Engineer, this paper explains and looks at Gujarat Violence from the historical point of view. It traces how the animosity between Hindu Muslims started due to the partition and traces its history. The repetition of communal massacres in India demonstrates that our political system and secular governance are fundamentally flawed. Gujarat's carnage did not occur overnight or in response to what

occurred in Godhra. We as a nation have consistently recognized that there are differences, so we adopted a secular constitution. "Dams, Displacement and The Human Cost of Development", by Youth Ki Awaaz Society, in this article, the author tells us the human cost of development. It sheds light on the fact that the worst affected when it comes to displacement due to development projects are tribals, representing almost 34% of the affected population. Land acquisition has always been one of the controversial issues for all projects, leading to the massive evacuation of people. Similarly, in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), displaced people due to development or development displacement population is the largest category. This is also one of the driving forces for internal migration. The tribals who have no place else to go, who depend on the forests for everything, are thrown out of their places, which is their everything.

"The hanging of Afzal Guru is a stain on India's democracy", by Arundhati Roy, throughout this article, the author tells us that this trial infringes the defendant's fundamental rights. Moreover, the pile of lies and forged, false evidence continues indefinitely. There is nothing else. The difference between the execution of the Guru and the tens of thousands who died in lockup is that the drama of his life and death took place in the bright daytime, and all Indian democratic institutions were diligently involved in his execution. "NARRATING 9/11", by John N. Duvall and Robert P. Marzec, in this article, the readers will learn about attacks and their effects. Ten years have passed since 19 al-Qaeda allies hijacked four U.S. planes and flew them to the Tower of the World Trade Centre. The attack on New York has proven to be symbolic. The Twin Towers themselves are iconic and instantly noticeable in the details of the skyline of New York's metropolis due to endless movies, T.V. shows, and even video games. "Two-decades-later-the-enduring-legacy-of-9-11", by Hannah Hartig and Carroll Doherty, this article tells us how that sorrowful day is still intact in people's minds. "Americans watched in horror the terrorist assaults of September 11, 2001, which left almost 3,000 humans dead. They watched in sorrow nearly twenty years later when the nation's army left Afghanistan. Their venture in Afghanistan - which commenced much less than a month after 9/11 - got here to a bloody and chaotic conclusion. The departure has raised long-time period questions on U.S." overseas coverage and America's area withinside the world. Nevertheless, the public's

preliminary judgments on that venture are explicit: the majority endorses the choice to withdraw from Afghanistan, even when the U.S. criticizes the Biden.

“Unlawful Activities and Prevention Act (UAPA) should go the way of Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) & POTA: Indian Penal Code (IPC) has more than enough provisions to deal with cases of terror and unlawful associations”, by Neha Singhal, in this, the author makes a reference to POTA and says that the UAPA act is just the same old wine in a new bottle. As laws such as POTA were revoked, so should be the case with UAPA. These laws do not deserve a place in a democracy. The provisions of this Act have an exceptionally colossal ambit. The Act offers the police sweeping powers and makes it almost impossible for humans to get bail. The author says that IPC is sufficient to deal with terror cases.

## **ANALYSIS**

The book begins with questioning the very idea of democracy. The author tells us that we have a society that has adopted democracy because it is the best available alternative, not the ideal aspiration. Every time we question the idea of democracy, we compare different models and end up defending democracy instead. The first essay in the book is related to the Godhra riots, which occurred after a Muslim mob burned alive fifty-eight passengers on a train. Hours after the incident, a planned mass murder was unleashed against the Muslim community. There were many shocking occurrences within this incident. A shocking incident was that 39 people were burned at the bungalow in Chamanpura, Ahmedabad, along with former M.P. Ehsan Jafri. A politician in the city, Jaffri, a vocal critic of PM Modi, continued to call various authorities, including police chiefs and politicians but did not get help, even as the police near his house were just watching all this violence unleashed. It is critical to provide some light on the nature of communalism at this point. It is not, as some believe, the result of religion; instead, it is the result of the politics of a religious community's leadership. To put it another way, communalism is not born of religion. A religious community does it. It is also worth noting that communalism did not emerge throughout the middle ages but rather during the Modern Era. The author says that the USA used the disinformation and lies which were surfaced after

September 2001 attacks to invade two countries. Similarly, the Indian government uses the same plot, but the key difference is that they use it against their very own people. The Indian state is always keen to harass people. "POTA is an example of that. Under POTA, you cannot get bail unless you can prove you are innocent- of a crime that you have not been formally charged with. Essentially, you have to prove you are innocent even if you are unaware of the crime you are supposed to have committed. And that applies to all of us. Technically, we are a nation waiting to be accused." (Roy, 2001)

We do not want to see these dark sides of India, and hence we have a look at other things to cheer us up, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). We always hear that GDP growth in our country is exceptional. But what about the economic gap between rich and poor, farmers doing suicide, and the reports of severe starvation and malnutrition coming from diverse parts of the country. "So, dangerous level of malnutrition and permanent hunger are the preferred model these days. Forty-seven percent of India's children below three suffer from malnutrition, 46 percent are stunted" (Roy, 2001). Now coming to the next chapter, we will have a look at how Afzal Guru was granted the death penalty. There were wide-open holes in the case, but still, every institution of India played an active role in his hanging and for the injustice meted out to him. Did we do all this just to satisfy our collective conscience? In these times, the situations are very thin on the ground, when the Indian people, or at least their main political parties, "Congress", the "Communist Party of India", and the "Communist Party of India (Marxists)", were united on an issue, gathered to celebrate the rule of victory in the law. Those celebrating the victory of the rule of the law claim that the fact that Indian courts acquitted Geelani proves that the trial was free and fair. Was it?

The speedy trial began in May 2002. The world was still rocking in the frenzy of September 11, 2001. In Gujarat, the Islamic massacre continued sporadically with the support of police and government agencies. The air was filled with collective hatred. Furthermore, in the case of a parliamentary attack, the law took its own path—essential stages of the Criminal Procedure, gathering evidence, hearing of witnesses, reasons for discussions were done swiftly, in a distorted manner. Guru was imprisoned in the most prominent security room and had no

lawyer. A junior lawyer appointed to court did not even visit his client in prison, did not invite him to defend his witnesses, and did not cross-examine the witnesses on the prosecution's side. The judge said the situation could not be changed. However, the incident collapsed from the beginning. Some examples from many: The two guiltiest pieces of evidence against Guru were mobile phones and laptops confiscated at the time of his arrest. They were not "sealed." The trial revealed that the laptop's hard drive was accessed after the arrest. It contained only a counterfeit I.D. from the Home Ministry, a counterfeit I.D. from which the "terrorist" entered the Parliament, and a video clip from Zee TV in the Parliament building. According to the police, Guru deleted all information except the most critical ones. Police witnesses said they sold a SIM card on December 4, 2001. However, somehow the prosecution's own call recording showed that Sim was actually working on November 6, 2001. This linked all the defendants in the case to Guru. "How did the police arrive at Afzal? They said Geelani led them to him. However, court records show that news of Afzal's arrest came before they met Geelani. The Supreme Court called this a serious contradiction, but left it alone and untouched." (Roy, 2001) It continues to be evidence of this mountain of lies and counterfeiting, through which Afzal Guru was convicted. Any person interested in revealing the secrets of a parliamentary attack would have followed the path of in-depth evidence. No one did so, so the real culprit of the plot was identified and not investigated. The true story and tragedy of what happened to the Guru are too big to be tried. The true story leads us to this potential nuclear hotspot and the Kashmir Valley, the world's densest military zone.

"Since 1990, when the self-determination struggle intensified, 68,000 people have died, 10,000 have disappeared, and at least 100,000 have been tortured. What highlights the hanging of the Guru was the dazzling day when all the democratic institutions in India played their part in killing him, as opposed to the tens of thousands who died in the cell. It means that his life and death were performed in the light. Hope our collective dignity will be met after he is hanged. Or is our blood cup still only half full?" (Roy, 2001) The author also tells us how the USA took the defense of the 9/11 attacks to bomb many countries and innocent children. Now, the USA has left Afghanistan, with the Taliban as the in-charge of Afghanistan. The USA came into the countries, waged war, and created a mess, and when it was time to clean it, they left the

countries. These are some of the incidents discussed in the book that make us aware that everything is not working in our country and that there are dark aspects that we do not want to see.

## CONCLUSION

This book is a perfect example of how we humans choose to see what we want, even when the truth is right in front of our eyes. This book tells us what happens when we become indifferent towards our surroundings. It tells us that most of the time is hate and lies manufactured to suit the needs of a particular political party, how they want to create a deep divide through the propaganda of religion. We also see how the most disadvantaged are always told to sacrifice, even when they don't have anything. The events discussed in the book demonstrate how politics works in any political system. It presents us with the dark side of politics, which is selfish and corrupt in nature. It demonstrates how the common man is duped by the very leaders he entrusted the responsibility of his well-being. Where the truth is hidden from him under the guise of progress and how their leaders' shoddy actions are wrapped up in the ignorance of the masses. This book has many aspects to it as it attempts to paint a picture of any society, the scrambling for power and authority while pretending to be ignorant of everything else. It is easy to see how people can be when ignorance reigns supreme in their minds. Furthermore, it demonstrates why people must think clearly and see the big picture.