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Arundhati Roy as a Postcolonial Philosopher of Resistance: Literature, Ethics, and Political Praxis

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Abstract:
This research article examines Arundhati Roy's literary and political writings as a unified intellectual and ethical project that transcends conventional boundaries between fiction, political critique, and philosophy. It argues that Arundhati Roy's corpus constitutes a coherent counter-hegemonic discourse in which literature becomes a form of political praxis and moral intervention. Integrating narrative imagination with political critique, Arundhati Roy constructs an epistemic framework where power is understood as a structural condition embedded in institutions, ideologies, cultural practices, and everyday life. Her work exposes the persistence of colonial logics in postcolonial societies through neoliberal capitalism, corporate globalization, militarized nationalism, caste hierarchy, patriarchy, and religious majoritarianism.
The study demonstrates how Arundhati Roy's fiction and essays collectively produce a moral epistemology of resistance in which justice is defined as dignity, resistance as responsibility, and politics as ethical struggle. Through fragmented narrative forms, subaltern-centered epistemologies, and ideological critique, her writing destabilizes dominant discourses and reconstructs alternative ways of knowing society. Marginalized figures emerge as epistemic agents, transforming storytelling into a site of knowledge production and resistance. Arundhati Roy's critique of development, globalization, militarism, and neoliberal governance reframes political violence as ethical violence and economic injustice as moral failure rather than policy malfunction.
Positioning Arundhati Roy as a postcolonial philosopher of resistance, this article argues that her intellectual project does not seek institutional solutions but consciousness transformation. Her work functions as conscience literature that reconstructs moral imagination, redefines the role of the writer as an ethical agent, and reconfigures literature as a battlefield of ideology.

Keywords: Postcolonial Resistance, Literature and Power, Counter-Hegemony, Neoliberalism, Globalization, Militarism, Intersectionality, Subaltern Epistemology, Moral Philosophy, Political Praxis, Structural Violence, Counter-Discourse

Arundhati Roy's literary and political writings constitute a unified intellectual project that transcends conventional boundaries between fiction, political critique, and ethical philosophy. Her work does not operate within the limited domain of literary representation alone but emerges as a sustained critique of modern power structures, ideological domination, and systemic injustice. By integrating narrative

imagination with political intervention, Arundhati Roy constructs a counter-hegemonic discourse that challenges dominant frameworks of nationalism, globalization, militarism, neoliberal capitalism, caste hierarchy, patriarchal power, and religious majoritarianism. Her writing transforms literature into a site of ideological struggle and political resistance, redefining the role of the writer as an ethical agent within public life. Rather than separating art from politics, Arundhati Roy collapses this distinction, demonstrating that storytelling itself can function as political praxis and moral intervention.

Her novels and political essays together form a coherent epistemic system in which power is not treated as an isolated political phenomenon but as a structural condition embedded within institutions, discourses, cultural practices, and everyday life. Power, in Arundhati Roy's framework, is not merely exercised through state apparatuses but circulates through language, ideology, development narratives, economic policies, and social hierarchies. This understanding aligns her work with critical traditions in postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, feminist thought, and discourse analysis, while simultaneously extending these traditions through a distinct ethical vision of resistance. Arundhati Roy's writing exposes how colonial logics of domination persist in postcolonial societies through transformed mechanisms of control such as corporate globalization, neoliberal governance, militarized nationalism, and cultural normalization of inequality.

In her fiction, Arundhati Roy constructs narrative worlds where private life and political structures are inseparable. Intimacy, desire, kinship, and memory are revealed as sites where power operates and social hierarchies are reproduced. Social control is not imposed solely through law or force but through emotional regulation, cultural codes, and symbolic boundaries. Her narratives demonstrate that domination is sustained as much through consent as through coercion, making injustice appear natural, inevitable, and morally legitimate. By exposing these processes, Arundhati Roy destabilizes the ideological foundations of social order and reveals hierarchy as a constructed system rather than a natural condition. Her storytelling therefore functions as ideological critique, where narrative form itself becomes a tool of resistance.

Arundhati Roy's narrative strategies disrupt conventional literary realism through fragmentation, nonlinearity, and temporal dislocation, reflecting the fractured realities of postcolonial societies shaped by historical trauma, displacement, and structural violence. This aesthetic instability is not merely stylistic but political, as it resists narrative coherence that would otherwise normalize injustice. By refusing closure and resolution, her fiction mirrors the unresolved conditions of social inequality and political oppression. Memory becomes non-linear, history becomes contested, and identity becomes unstable, reflecting the lived realities of marginalized communities whose lives are shaped by systemic exclusion rather than narrative continuity.

Central to Arundhati Roy's literary politics is her construction of marginalized figures as epistemic subjects rather than narrative objects. Subaltern characters are not portrayed merely as victims but as carriers of knowledge, memory, and moral truth. Their experiences generate alternative ways of understanding society that challenge elite perspectives and institutional authority. In privileging marginalized epistemologies, Arundhati Roy reverses representational hierarchies and constructs a counter-archive of knowledge grounded in lived experience rather than official discourse. This narrative strategy transforms literature into a form of epistemic resistance, where storytelling challenges dominant knowledge systems and ideological assumptions.

Arundhati Roy's critique of globalization reveals it as a contemporary form of imperial domination that reproduces colonial hierarchies through economic dependency, corporate governance, and militarized

state control. Globalization, in her analysis, is not a neutral process of economic integration but an ideological project that legitimizes dispossession, inequality, and violence through the language of development, reform, and modernization. Corporate-state alliances replace democratic governance, transforming political systems into managerial structures that prioritize profit over human dignity. Democracy becomes performative, while real power shifts to transnational institutions, financial elites, and corporate networks.

Neoliberal capitalism is exposed as a system of structural violence that commodifies social life and transforms human rights into market privileges. Development projects, privatization policies, and resource extraction schemes are reframed as organized dispossession rather than progress. Arundhati Roy's critique situates economic growth within moral discourse, exposing development as a form of class warfare that benefits elites while displacing vulnerable populations. Her ethical framing rejects technocratic rationality and insists on moral accountability, redefining economic injustice as ethical violence rather than policy failure.

Militarism emerges in Arundhati Roy's work as a structural component of global capitalism rather than an exceptional political condition. War functions as an economic strategy, a political tool, and an ideological mechanism that normalizes violence and suppresses dissent. War discourse operates through moral absolutism, producing binary narratives that legitimize state violence and suppress ethical scrutiny. Security becomes a justification for repression, surveillance, and militarization, transforming citizenship into conditional belonging and political dissent into criminality.

Arundhati Roy's analysis of caste, gender, and social hierarchy constructs an intersectional framework of domination in which multiple systems of power operate simultaneously. Caste is not treated as a cultural residue but as a modern political structure that adapts to contemporary institutions. Patriarchy is not reduced to individual discrimination but exposed as an institutional system embedded within legal, economic, and cultural structures. Gender oppression intersects with caste hierarchy, class inequality, and cultural control, producing layered forms of marginalization. This intersectional vision rejects simplistic identity politics and constructs a relational understanding of oppression as a networked system of power.

Her representation of transgender identities, religious minorities, displaced populations, and political dissidents expands the scope of subaltern politics beyond traditional categories. Identity becomes a site of resistance rather than classification, challenging normative frameworks of belonging and citizenship. Arundhati Roy's subaltern politics is not rooted in assimilation but in systemic transformation, rejecting inclusion without structural change. Dignity, rather than rights alone, becomes the ethical foundation of justice.

As a public intellectual, Arundhati Roy redefines authorship as ethical responsibility. Writing becomes a form of civic action rather than cultural production. The writer is not an observer of injustice but a participant in ideological struggle. This model of engaged intellectualism rejects neutrality and detachment, positioning silence as complicity and critique as moral duty. Arundhati Roy's intellectual autonomy allows her to challenge power without ideological alignment, but it also places her outside institutional legitimacy, exposing her to political marginalization and delegitimization.

Her resistance discourse is grounded not in doctrinal ideology but in moral philosophy. Injustice is framed as moral failure rather than administrative error. Resistance becomes ethical necessity rather than political strategy alone. This ethical resistance model prioritizes conscience over governance,

responsibility over power, and dignity over domination. Writing becomes an act of moral courage rather than professional performance.

At the same time, Arundhati Roy's discourse is not without limitations. Her moral absolutism can simplify complex political realities into binary oppositions. Emotional rhetoric sometimes replaces analytical nuance. Resistance is articulated more as ethical refusal than institutional transformation, raising questions about political efficacy. Her outsider position limits collective mobilization and strategic engagement with governance structures. Yet these limitations are inseparable from her strengths. Her moral clarity enables ethical confrontation, her emotional intensity enables mobilization, and her autonomy enables ideological independence.

Arundhati Roy's intellectual project must therefore be understood not as system-building theory but as system-unmasking critique. She does not design governance models but dismantles moral complacency. Her work functions as conscience literature, transforming political consciousness rather than institutional policy. Her contribution lies in redefining the relationship between culture, politics, and ethics, demonstrating that literature is central to ideological struggle, that storytelling is a form of resistance, and that writing is a moral act.

Her corpus ultimately constructs a moral epistemology of power in which justice is defined as dignity, resistance as responsibility, and politics as ethical struggle. Power is understood not merely as authority but as structural domination. Knowledge becomes a site of contestation. Culture becomes a battlefield of ideology. Literature becomes political praxis. In this vision, the writer emerges as an ethical agent, the reader as a political subject, and the text as a site of resistance.

Arundhati Roy's work therefore stands as a unified archive of resistance that transforms literature into political action and political critique into moral philosophy. She redefines the role of culture in political life and reconstructs the moral imagination of resistance. Her writing does not offer solutions in the form of policies or programs but offers something more foundational: a transformation of political consciousness, an awakening of ethical responsibility, and a reconstruction of moral vision. In this sense, Arundhati Roy emerges not simply as a novelist or activist but as a postcolonial philosopher of resistance whose work constitutes a coherent ideological system grounded in ethical dissent and epistemic transformation.

Conclusion:

This study has argued that Arundhati Roy's literary and political writings constitute a single, coherent intellectual project grounded in ethical resistance and epistemic transformation. Her work transcends disciplinary boundaries between fiction, politics, and philosophy, constructing a counter-hegemonic discourse in which literature becomes a form of political action and moral intervention. By integrating narrative imagination with ideological critique, Arundhati Roy reconceptualizes power as a structural condition embedded within institutions, discourses, cultural practices, and everyday life, rather than as a merely political phenomenon.

Arundhati Roy's corpus reveals how domination operates through normalization, consent, cultural codes, and symbolic systems as much as through coercion and state violence. Her fiction exposes the intimate spaces of power where identity, memory, desire, and kinship become sites of political control, while her political essays extend this critique to globalization, neoliberal capitalism, militarism, caste hierarchy, patriarchy, and religious majoritarianism. Together, these writings construct a moral

epistemology in which injustice is understood as ethical failure, resistance as moral obligation, and justice as dignity rather than legal recognition alone.

By centering marginalized voices as epistemic subjects, Arundhati Roy reverses representational hierarchies and produces a counter-archive of knowledge rooted in lived experience. Her narrative strategies—fragmentation, nonlinearity, and aesthetic instability—function as political forms that resist ideological closure and normalize neither suffering nor inequality. Literature, in this framework, becomes a site of ideological struggle where storytelling itself operates as resistance.

Although Arundhati Roy's discourse carries limitations in its moral absolutism and strategic political engagement, these tensions are inseparable from the ethical clarity and radical autonomy that define her intellectual position. Her contribution lies not in institutional design but in moral destabilization; not in governance models but in conscience formation. Ultimately, Arundhati Roy's work reconstructs the relationship between culture, politics, and ethics by redefining writing as moral action, the reader as political subject, and the text as a site of resistance. In this sense, Arundhati Roy emerges not merely as a novelist or activist, but as a postcolonial philosopher of resistance whose unified intellectual project reshapes political consciousness and ethical imagination in contemporary critical thought.

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