

***Book Review***

**Capitalism on Trial**

**Capitalism: A Ghost Story**

Arundhati Roy, 2014

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Arundhati Roy is an Indian author and a political activist who has written many bestselling books. She had won the Booker prize in 1997 for her novel “The God of Small Things”. Here, I have chosen her another book “Capitalism: A Ghost Story” for review because in this book she has raised many contemporary issues that are prevalent not only in India but all over the world. This book describes how unchecked, deregulated and crony the impacts of capitalism have on the impoverished masses. It is basically an analysis and documentation of the disastrous consequences of unchecked global capitalism unleashed in India.

Chapter One starts with the description of how handful of Indian business owners are living luxurious life and running the whole country. A hundred of people own assets equivalent to fourth of India’s Gross Domestic Product. Much of the investment of these corporations is in mine, gas field, steel plants, telephone, etc. For this purpose, the government has forcibly taken the land of millions of people and handed over to corporations. People’s voices are hardly heard as the institutions of democracy – the courts, the parliament, the media – are heavily controlled by the money from those corporations.

Roy describes in detail that in the name of free market, the Government gives trillions of dollars of mineral to the private companies, by snatching the land of indigenous people. When people come to oppose this, they have been jailed and killed. In addition, the privately-owned companies are constructing many high dams and industrial corridors across the country with the support of government, causing the displacement of millions of people. The scenario that Roy portrays is hard to dispute and is true not only of India but of those parts of Globe where the corporations are strong and powerful. People who live in the land that are rich in natural resources which government and corporations as source

of rapid economic growth and profit are the most vulnerable and affected. Even the United Nations attests to the conflictual and exploitative relation between indigenous peoples and industrial corporation characterized by blatant violation of fundamental freedom and rights of the indigenous people (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2007). The UN has pointed out that mega projects such as mineral, oil and gas extraction, monoculture plantation, dams have been problematic and have displaced and impacted the indigenous people (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2007).

Roy further claims, contrary to what “independent” media are supposed to do in democracy, none of these issues come in media. The media (corporate media) intentionally do not let public be aware of such issues as major shares of their revenue come from corporate advertisement. It is to be noted that “independent” media works in the interest of corporation not only in India. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman in “The Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media” have depicted how the media in the United States play role in shaping the perception of people which ultimately serves the interest of the elite groups of the society and have concluded that the so called independent media is nothing more than an instrument of elite class or corporations whose role is to set the economic, social and political agenda of that very groups (Herman & Chomsky, 1998). Such behaviour of media is true of all countries where big corporation are powerful enough to influence and control the media.

Roy discusses why philanthropic foundations invest in the third world countries. These foundations not only spend trillions of dollars every year in the third world countries but also work as facilitators of the US capitalism. They pour money for influencing and shaping the foreign policy of these countries, directing their economic policy. To achieve this goal, they intervene in the grassroots political movements locally and internationally by providing millions in grants and loans. The rapid expansion of philanthropic foundations can be seen over the last two decades. This expansion is not only in size but also in funds which estimate range is up to \$10 billion per year (Martens & Seitz, 2015). These philanthropic organizations work in a number of ways. These foundations, as Roy demonstrates, spend millions of dollars on academic institutions and pedagogy to promote and maintain their dominant culture. Paulo Freire also has the same opinion and condemns the pattern of such kind of pedagogy where the rulers use this type of education as an instrument of oppression by demobilising and conditioning the learners to accept the status quo of the dominant culture (Freire, 1968/1970). It seems that education has been an important social institution through which corporate interests are served.

In Chapter Two, Roy again talks about the role of Indian media by bringing the incident of Anna Hajare’s anti-corruption movement. She argues that the purpose of highlighting and giving high media attention to this movement was to deviate the mass from the main issue. She further adds that the campaign for the Jan Lokpal Bill came at the same time when WikiLeaks had exposed the corruption of many politicians, corporations and senior

journalists. So, by highlighting this movement, the media deviated the main issues of corruption very cleverly.

Chapter Three starts with the description of state's suppression to journalists and activists who talked about the issues of Kashmir or about the movement of Adivasi people. These people have been imprisoned for waging war against the state. The imprisoned people do not get any legal assistance and media produce nonews about their suffering. A few journalists who try to bring these issues to public have been arrested, tortured, harassed and even killed with false accusations. The vulnerability of the journalists reporting the issues of voiceless people has become a worldwide phenomenon. Even worse, "democratic" governments side with corporation and big business in suppressing the dissents. The governments, as Greenslade observes, cannot tolerate the disagreement and use different covert and overt methods to suppress such information (Greenslade, 2015). People's voices are systematically suppressed by an alliance of government, big business and media.

Chapter Four is all about Roy's visit to Kashmir and here she depicts the picture of Indian military domination in that region and a massive anti-Indian Army sentiment among the local people as well. She brings many heart touching stories, such as how women live in remote village where there are more soldiers than civilians. During this visit, she confronts with the many terrible stories of the village women who were being raped and murdered by the Indian soldiers.

In Chapter Five and Six, Roy talks about the hanging of Afzal Guru who was accused of being the mastermind of 2001 parliament attack and the political consequences of his secret hanging. After his execution, the violence out broke in Kashmir. Based on this protest, the Indian government got a good chance to militarise Kashmir and terrorise Kashmiri people. She indicates that the government's main purpose was to militarise Kashmir; so Afzal Guru was mere a victim of a grand conspiracy and the Government played dirty politics over his corpse. Roy concludes the book by giving a hint that the perpetuation of war in Kashmir may be in the interest of defence and weapons industry, as they supply their weapons both to the government and the rebels. She suspects, maybe all these are going on in the interest of India's professional warmongers.

In conclusion, the author investigates and analyses how the handful of corporations are controlling the institutions of government and using them to increase their profit and making the life of the common people disastrous. She depicts the picture of how their interest from Country's vulnerable natural resources to weapon industries has been displacing millions of people and making the life of less fortunate people of the society difficult. Likewise, the book shows the real face of so-called independent media. The media are supposed to be independent and should broadcast the burning issues of the society but they do not always do that. Since they receive massive money from these corporations, they not only uncover such issues but also deviate the discourse from real issues. She

also provides eye opening examples of how the international foundations and NGOs are supporting the rise of privatisation and blocking the path of grassroots movements against corporate capitalism. She wraps up her book by suspecting the Indian warmongers for being responsible for the perpetuation of war in Kashmir.

The book is the mixture of both descriptive and narrative writing. Roy's rhetoric all over the book is very engaging and energising; however, it is very hard for general readers to understand her high sounding words. It seems that her choice of words has limited this book only inside the academic circle. The book justifies its title as she has presented numerous evidences of how capitalism has been able to survive by killing innocent people, yet the connection of Chapters Five and Six with the theme of the book is little ambiguous. She has devoted these full two chapters to discussing the hanging of Afzal Guru and the militarisation of boarder but does not present concrete evidence of how this is related to capitalism. Despite these few shortcomings, this book retains the capacity to enlighten a vast number of readers by exposing the evils of corporate capitalism as ruthless, violent and murderous.

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