

Arundhati Roy Takes A Hard Look At Democracy

Book: *"Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy"; Author: Arundhati Roy; Publisher: Penguin-Books India*

BY MADHUSREE CHATTERJEE

Man Booker winning author Arundhati Roy takes a probing look at the underbelly of the world's oldest democracy in her new anthology of essays "Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy" published this week.

"By democracy, I don't mean democracy as an ideal or an aspiration. I mean the working model: western liberal democracy, and its variants. Attempts to answer this question often turn into a comparison of different systems of governance and end with a somewhat prickly, combative defence of democracy. It's flawed, but it's better than anything else that's on offer," Roy said.

The anthology is typically Arundhati Roy - candid, chatty, lucid and probing - more like snapshots from all her earlier works of non-fiction since 1999.

With intelligent political insight, she shows how the journey of Hindu nationalism and neo-liberal economic reforms, flagged off almost around the same time in the early 1990s, is now manifest in dangerous ways.

The book begins with an essay on the state-backed killing of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, explaining how "progress and genocide" have always been comrades-in-arms. They either take place together or follow each other in a strange cycle of fate.

"Fascism's firm footprints has appeared in India. Let's mark the date: Spring 2002. While we can thank the US president and the coalition against terror for creating a congenial international atmosphere for fascism's ghastly debut, we cannot credit them for the years it has been brewing in our public and private lives... it breezed in after the Pokhran nuclear tests of 1998," Roy writes in her essay, "Democracy: Who's She, When She's At Home".

The argument makes sense.

In the essay, "How deep shall we dig", a text of the lecture that she delivered at the Aligarh Muslim University in 2004, she uses Kashmir to establish the Indian government's handling of terrorism along its margins - Jammu and Kashmir and in the seven sister states of the Northeast where

the "schism between the real and the virtual world has turned into a place of endless speculation and potential insanity".

Roy brings POTA and allied terrorism-related laws under the scanner and poses a disturbing question - "Successful fascism takes hard work. And so does creating a good investment climate. Do the two work well together?"

"Azadi", another essay that first appeared in The Guardian in August 2008, rakes up a controversy - one that leaves most of us squirming in discomfort.

Roy pleads for an "azad Kashmir" saying "for all these years, the Indian state, known among knowing as a 'deep state', has done everything it can - subvert, suppress, represent, misrepresent, discredit, intimidate, purchase - and simply snuff out the voice of the Kashmiri people".

India needs 'azadi' from Kashmir just as much - if not more - than Kashmir needs azadi from India, she writes. Which is well, but the essay fails to address who makes up the Kashmiri people and the holes in history? Can an Azad Kashmir make room for all?

The concluding essay, "Nine is Not Eleven (And November isn't September)" is perhaps the most soul-searching of the lot.

It is a spotlight on the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks - published in The Guardian in December 2008. The essay, while describing the horrors of the blasts, as beamed across by television channels and the post-mortems that followed the live coverage, makes a pertinent point.

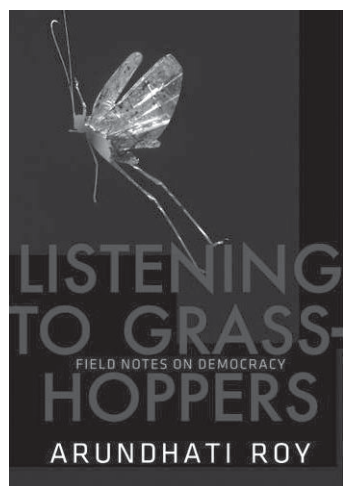
"Dangerous, stupid oversimplification like the police are good/politicians are bad... Tragically, this regression into intellectual infancy comes when people in India were beginning to see that, in the business of terrorism, victims and perpetrators often exchange roles," she writes, citing Kashmir as an instance.

The collection is thought-provoking and well-researched.

But in retrospect, the thin line between reportage, editorial writing, sermonising and the fine art of non-fiction essay writing seems to overlap too frequently in the anthology.



Arundhati Roy



Love Aaj Kal – Romance Rules Forever, Aaj and Kal

BY JYOTHSNA HEGDE

Imtiaz Ali is clearly the master of making movies in urban settings. He has a keen eye and ear for the young, metropolitan lifestyle and lingo which reverberates all through his movies, be it 'Jab We Met' or 'Love Aaj Kal'.

Love Aaj Kal literally follows the story of love in times of Aaj and Kal. Jai (Saif Ali Khan) and Meera (Deepika Padukone) are the protagonists of today's romantic track while Veer

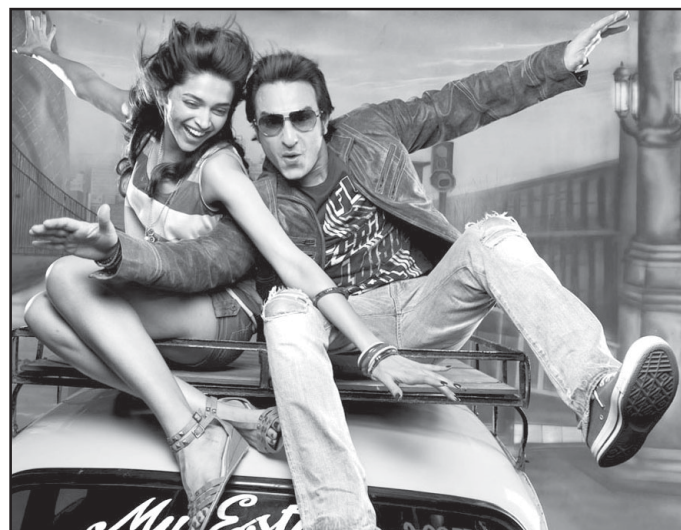
day practical minded, career oriented Jai realize that true love still prevails, maybe hidden in a contemporary way of life, buried under online chat sessions and status updates? What does it take for him to apprehend love, follow the journey, it is heartfelt.

The male characters in the movie are well etched, however one of the problems with the movie is the definition female characters. Unlike the Geet of Jab We Met, Meera and Harleen do not have enough flesh to

bite into. Meera comes across as someone more aware of herself than Jai, but then she marries someone else. Her passion for career or actions of love are not clearly carved and that inhibits the story from reaching the heights that Jab We Met reached. However, Imtiaz Ali deserves complete credit for his multilayered storyline that gels perfectly with changing modern times.

Saif Ali Khan emotes comfortably and Deepika matches him effortlessly. There is a certain carefree, easy camaraderie between the two actors that makes this film work. The only scene that has Neetu Singh

and Rishi Kapoor together is endearing. Story goes that the Brazilian model Giselle Monteiro was initially auditioned for Jai's modern day girlfriend role but instead landed up as the shy



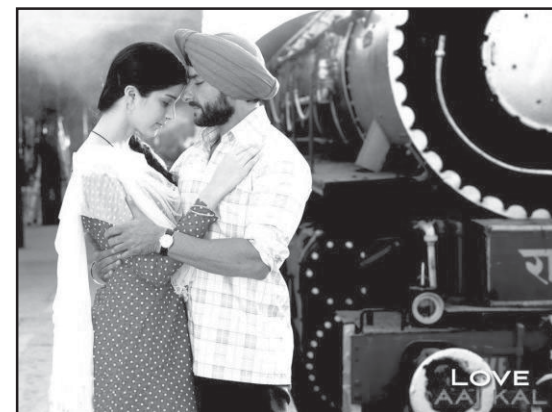
Singh (Saif Ali Khan as young Rishi Kapoor) and Harleen Kaur (Giselle Monteiro) represent the couple of yesteryears. The fresh treatment to the movie is the fact that the 2 stories develop and run parallel to each other and climax together at the end.

Jai, the architect dreams of working on the golden gate bridge in San Francisco and Meera is into art restoration and wants to work in India. They meet, date and also mutually agree to break up in London when work draws Meera to India. They even throw a break up party and the scene where friends discuss whether they should be happy or sad at the party, wear funeral or celebratory clothes is quite fresh and funny. On the day Meera has to leave, restaurateur Veer Singh offers to take Jai to the airport to see Meera one last time, even though Jai insists Meera would understand he could not show up because he had car trouble.

Instead Meera tells him she knew he would come and Jai is shocked at her joy. So Jai asks Veer Singh's story and we are thrown into his past. Imtiaz's genius is in the fact the he develops both these stories at the same pace, so we go back and forth in time.

Veer Singh is in love with Harleen. However unlike our SMSes and Facebook times, stealthy glances and silent gestures were the only means of affectionate expression during those times and Veer expresses himself in muted language only Harleen understands. He even travels hundreds of miles for a glimpse of her when her family moves away.

Since they are broken up, Jai and Meera decide to tell each other things they hated about each other. They even help each other find and decide on their new partners. Will the modern



and submissive Harleen and she fits surprisingly well into her character.

Cinematography by N Natarajan Subramaniam, who also worked on Jab We Met compliments the stories of today and yesterday. While the story of yesterday has the feel of an old black and white movie with color added to it, the story of today is nicely contrasted by bright and flashy color palette. Background music by Salim-Sulaiman is easy on the ears and blends well. Pritam's music offers a laid back, breezy music pleasant on the ears. 'Dooriyan' and 'Chor Bazaari' are quite catchy.

All its flaws apart, Romance rules Love Aaj Kal. Heartfelt moments, clean performances, catchy music, watching this movie is like having a good vacation – warms your heart while feeling the need for a little bit more.

Visit our Portal at NRIPulse.com

News, Views, Blogs, Free Classifieds, Business Directory, exciting Photo Features, Events listing and more!!!

Visit us at www.NRIPulse.com