

I enjoyed reading your first novel. I respect some of the stands you have taken. I write this to you because I fear your methods will seriously undermine the very causes you espouse. You care about India. You care about the environment. You are worried about the impact of big dams on communities. You fear the influence of global multinationals. You are aghast at the religious strife in India. I share many of these concerns. But I have serious doubts about your approach.

We have learnt the language of our conquerors. We have lost touch with our own ways. Can we discuss the recent speech you made in the World Social Forum in Brazil, on the topic of “Confronting Empire”? You state:

India — the world’s biggest democracy — is currently at the forefront of the corporate globalisation project. Its “market” of one billion people is being prised open by the WTO. Corporatization and privatisation are being welcomed by the government and the Indian elite. It is not a coincidence that the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, the Disinvestment Minister — the men who signed the deal with Enron in India, the men who are selling the country’s infrastructure to corporate multinationals, the men who want to privatise water, electricity, oil, coal, steel, health, education and telecommunication — are all members or admirers of the RSS. The RSS is a right wing, ultra-nationalist Hindu guild which has openly admired Hitler and his methods.

Hitler seals the proof of Evil. Globalisation = Privatisation = Prime Minister and Disinvestment Minister of India = RSS = right-wing Hindu guild = admirers of Hitler. And Hitler is clearly black. So must be the rest. Tie all the witches to a single stake.

The Empire Within

Response to Arundhati Roy’s Speech at The World Social Forum

○Sankrant Sanu

Point to a convicted one. Burn them all. All bad. All black, painted with the Hitler brush, everyone loses their humanity by the sheer power of innuendo. Two short paragraphs. The aspersion is clear.

Who can say a word now for fear of painful ignominy? Or escape from being reduced to a sniffing idiot to avoid the taint of this sweeping brush? Under the glaring lights of the trial of hyperbole, a few timid, shy facts, shuffle in to speak. For example, the fact that the Enron project was largely shepherded by the Congress, the political rivals of the current establishment. The Congress initiated globalisation in India. The RSS has *opposed globalisation*.

Hyperbole is easy. Shall we spin such a tale? That Hitler’s Nazi party was the National *Socialist* Party, and that it was “*gegen Bolschewismus und Kapital*”. You continue:

The two arms of the Indian Government have evolved the perfect pincer action. While one arm is busy selling India off in chunks, the other, to divert attention, is orchestrating a howling, baying chorus of Hindu nationalism and religious fascism.

It is conducting nuclear tests, rewriting history books, burning churches, and demolishing mosques. Censorship, surveillance, the suspension of civil liberties and human rights, the definition of who is an Indian citizen and who is not,

particularly with regard to religious minorities, is becoming common practice now.

Evil people, aren’t they? Now howling, now baying, now engaging in censorship. Do you think the media today is less free than before? I, for one, see *less censorship* in India today, as compared to the glorious days that you appear nostalgic for. In movies, in television, with private cable channels (remember plain old government run DD with nothing but the Party line in the good old days?), and fashion shows – I remember the days of censorship and this is not the tightly censored India I remember. There is more unrelenting criticism of the government in every English newspaper than in the entire rest of the history of independent India. Consider that your own article, with no holds barred, is being published in a major Indian newsmagazine. Chomsky, with his quiet insistent logic, never had it so good. He still isn’t widely published in the mainstream press in America.

Can we work to free our history from ideology – Left or Right, Red or Saffron? Let us debate our understanding of history. Openly. Find the facts. Rather than blindly support existing establishment views and decay change. Or brush unpleasant truths under the carpet. There is understandable fear about bringing some truths out into the open. These fears are fanned by

extremists who seek to avenge the sins of the past on the people of the present. The extremists that seek revenge and the extremists that hide the truth are joined at the hip. Yin and yang. Two sides of the same reality. One couldn't exist without the other. Denial of history by one set of extremists is the platform that the other set stands on. When we fix one, the other will fall. The two devils. Globalisation and Gujarat. Are they linked, as you suggest? Let's take globalisation. Didn't the English-language media in India, and multinational TV channels like *Star News* excoriate Modi while native Gujarati newspapers supported him? So whom can we blame? Perhaps those damned voters who voted the evil man back, *despite* opposition from TV channels owned by multinational corporations.

What is your suggestion to the World Social Forum in Brazil? What should they lobby CNN to recommend, that the media in India hasn't done already? Leave Iraq, bomb India instead? Destroy the evil Indian government that supports globalisation, the evil RSS, which actually opposes it? Do you think it will convince Gujarati voters any more?

It appears as though people have lost the confidence of Ms. Roy. It is time to dissolve people. The barbaric killings in Gujarat do not represent the India we wish for. But grandstanding does not help. We must seek to understand how to break the cycle. To create a genuine peace. To say "never again" we must first discard the idea that violent voices will bring peace. Didn't you yourself say so, wisely, in your "Algebra of Infinite Justice." Can I take the liberty of paraphrasing and changing "September 11" to "Gujarat"?

"However, it will be a pity if, instead of using this as an opportunity to

try to understand why [Gujarat] happened, politically-motivated intellectuals use it as an opportunity to usurp the whole nation's sorrow, to mourn selectively and further their agenda. Because then it falls to the rest of us to ask the hard questions and say the harsh things. And for our pains, for our bad timing, we will be disliked, ignored and perhaps eventually silenced."

We grieve for Gujarat. Let our sorrow be large. Let it grieve for all innocents. For those murdered at Godhra. In a train. For all the innocent people killed in Gujarat. On the streets. In Punjab. In a bus. In Delhi. In their homes. Who are still being killed in Kashmir. On a pilgrimage. In Afghanistan. In a wedding party. In America. In a building. In Palestine. In Israel. In Tibet. In monasteries. In Bangladesh, two million of them. Maybe more. The countless millions more killed in the history of the Empire as it brought God and civilisation to the savages, idolators and *kafirs* throughout history. For their own good, of course. It grieves for all those killed in the murderous Partition of India. On both sides of the border. Our cup of sorrow is full. When our sorrow is large, we can see a larger pattern. It allows us to understand that the ways of the Empire have failed us. We need new ways.

We need to shun the politics of selective grief that you practise. Just like your opponents. Who to grieve for. And how much. Which displaced people. It looks at the dead. Grieve for this one, but skip the other. Tell this story, but not that one. It pleads for understanding one rage, while demonising the other.

Clearly you understand the power of empathy. But you apply it

selectively. Rage rules. But, we have tried rage. It has failed us. And we have failed to recognise that we need new ways to build a new world.

To do this, we first must escape the countless dualities of the way of the Empire. Heathen and Christian. Kafir and Muslim. Hindutva and Secular. Right and Left. Proletariat and Bourgeois. Ecology and Industry. In or Out. We cannot fight the Empire by re-slicing the world in to endless dualities patterned on its vision. The Empire has captured our minds. You, who think you are fighting it, have become its high priestess. The Empire is within us. It has taught us to foam in self-righteous anger. *We*, who are all good, endlessly pitted against *they* who are all evil. A duality born of *avidya*, the *rishis* would say.

This does not mean we lose the faculty to discriminate. Or cease to speak up when we see injustice. Or not stand firm for what we believe to be right and true. But that we temper it with humility. The other may also be a little bit right. We stop creating demons and create dialogues instead. We realise our common humanity, our common search across these labels. Ultimately we will all live or perish together. The Muslims and the Christians and the Secularists and Sanghis. We will not succeed in just destroying the other. If we continue to carry on this way, we will succeed in destroying all of us.

I write this to you, because I see the possibility of a dialogue of compassion. You, Arundhati, have been given a platform from which to speak. And the possibility of changing the terms of discourse. So an inner revolution can take place. As the sages and *rishis* that walked our land taught us. The way to real peace. *Shanti*. □

The author is an IT professional based in Seattle, USA