

# **India: 'We suffer from a pathological incuriosity': A conversation with Arundhati Roy**

Saturday 13 October 2007, by [ROY Arundhati](#), [SRIVASTAVA Mihir](#) (Date first published: 12 October 2007).

**Writer Arundhati Roy closely followed the Parliament attack trial. A shoddy probe is just another tool of repression, she told MIHIR SRIVASTAVA**

## **Has India become the pet target of terrorism?**

I don't know about "pet", but yes, it certainly has become a target, and we must ask ourselves why? Not every country in the world suffers from terrorist attacks. There is a war being fought in Kashmir - the publicity is that India has won this war, that "normalcy" has returned. But in Kashmir, normalcy flows from the barrel of a gun. There are 7,00,000 security personnel there, enforcing "normalcy" in Kashmir. In Iraq, in a fullfledged war, there are 1,25,000 to 1,50,000 US troops. What does normalcy in Kashmir look like? A little bit of democracy, a little bit of tourism, a cinema hall run by the cops, a TV channel run by the home ministry - who are they trying to fool? Normalcy forced on an angry, resentful people at gunpoint. If it was "normal", there would be talk of withdrawing troops. The only talk is of increasing them. Why? Why do we talk of the "will of the people" everywhere except in Kashmir? So, coming to your question, "terrorism" in India is, for the most part, a spillover from the valley of Kashmir. Time was when Kashmir wanted azaadi from India. Might we be heading for a time when India, or at least ordinary Indians, folks who want to go about their humble everyday lives, want azaadi from Kashmir? I don't know. And of course now there's Babri Masjid, the Bombay carnage, the Gujarat carnage - all of this complicates things and adds fuel to the fire. All of this exposes ordinary people to the possibility of an attack, anytime,

anywhere.

And let me say this - things have become so complicated, so twisted, so full of subterfuge, so full of lies and planted stories, fabricated evidence, that whenever there is an "attack", one never knows who has carried it out. Never. It could be the "terrorists", it could equally be the spooks. There's absolutely no knowing. This is not some crazed claim. Intelligence agencies have done this through the ages. In country after country. It's a hoary tradition. When it comes to these things, I can no longer believe what I'm asked to believe, I have no faith in what I read in the papers, in what I see on TV. It's mostly crap. No one ever gets to the bottom of anything. It's all left hanging, the air is thick with the ghosts of the victims of unsolved crimes. We seem to suffer from a pathological lack of curiosity.

**The investigations into terror attacks are shoddy. Doesn't this actually exacerbate terrorism?**

A "climate of terrorism" has been created. Many players - political parties, intelligence agencies, militant outfits - benefit from the attacks. Nothing is ever investigated; if an enquiry is ever set up, it's usually a smokescreen, a way to defuse a crisis. Whether it was the Parliament attack case, the burning of the coach of the Sabarmati Express in Godhra, whether it is the killing of the main witness of the Nithari murders or the fake encounter case of Sohrabuddin Sheikh, or the killing of the main witness in that case too. The establishment ensures that no one gets to the bottom of anything. It all sinks into the marsh, and then everybody puts their own political spin on it.

One gets the feeling that beyond a point investigations into such high-profile terror cases reveal little, they are more of a cover-up. It's an unholy nexus. Whatever you touch falls like a house of cards. But even when there is an exposé - like what happened in the case of the Parliament attack, or what we're seeing now in the Red Fort attack - when it is shown that evidence was fabricated, that we have been lied to, when we know what those lies were and who told them, still nothing happens. The police get medals, the judges get promoted, the journalists

get salary hikes. In the case of the attack on Parliament, we're talking about a case which could have resulted in a nuclear war. A case in which, on the basis of what has turned out to be false and fabricated evidence, the government of the day moved half-a-million troops to the border where they remained for eight months. Eight hundred soldiers died in the mobilisation process. Huge tracts of farmland were mined - those mines are still there. Thousands of crores of public money was spent. Who gave those orders? Why? Don't we want to know? Aren't we curious? Not a single political party has supported the demand for an enquiry, not a single MP has raised a question in Parliament, not a single newspaper has carried out a serious campaign. Why?

But speaking of cover-ups, look at how it all works in Gujarat, it's more than a coverup, it's criminal collusion. It's happening now, right now, while Tata and Reliance call Gujarat a dream destination for corporate capital, while the CII sucks up to Modi, while Sunita Williams accepts accolades and shares a stage with him. After the carnage in which thousands of ordinary Muslims were butchered and about 1,50,000 driven from their homes, the man who presided over it all, Narendra Modi, is still the chief minister. No one from the UPA government has so much as squeaked about it. Of the 287 cases filed under POTA, 286 are against Muslim and one is against a Sikh. Offences under POTA, as we know, are non-bailable, so they're all still in jail. The property of those accused in the Godhra massacre was attached. The property of those who were released on bail in the post- Godhra carnage was not. Different laws for Hindus and Muslims. In the case of several massacres, the lawyers that the Gujarat government appointed as public prosecutors had actually already appeared for the accused. Several of them belonged to the RSS or the VHP, organisations that proudly owned up to the killings. Survivors found that when they went to the police to file FIRs, the police would record their statements inaccurately, and refuse to record the names of the perpetrators. In several cases, when survivors had seen members of their families being burned alive, so their bodies could not be found, the police would refuse to register cases of murder. In massacres, in order to reduce the magnitude of the charges

and elide the detailing of individual crimes, the police clubbed FIRs together to make it all very vague and subvert the process of the criminal justice system.

The massacre at Gulberg Society in Ahmedabad, in which Ehsan Jaffri - who made the mistake of campaigning against Modi in the Rajkot elections - and 70 other people were killed and 10 women were raped over a period of ten-and-a-half hours. A mob of thousands of armed people began to assemble inside the Gulberg Society colony. That day, Jaffri made 200 phone calls, including many to senior police officers, to Modi and LK Advani. At about 10.30am, the then Commissioner of Police, PC Pandey, visited Gulberg, which is not far from the police headquarters. At about 2.30pm, Ehsan Jaffri surrendered himself to the mob, hoping the others would be spared. The mob stripped him, hacked off his body parts, paraded him half-alive around the colony to terrify people and then burned him alive. Subsequently, 70 people were killed and 10 to 12 women were gangraped before being burned alive. KG Erda, the inspector of the Meghaninagar police station, stood by and watched. PC Pandey was promoted to Director General of Police, Gujarat. As public prosecutor, the Gujarat government appointed a man called Chetan Shah who had already appeared for the accused in the same case!

Today, more than five years later, the killers remain free. And PC Pandey has continued to be an efficient servant of the State. As DGP, he has been instrumental in covering the tracks of the policemen involved in the macabre murder of Sohrabuddin Sheikh and his wife Kausar Bi. Newspapers have reported how he transferred police officers who were investigating the case when he realised they would not play by his rules. How he detailed two policemen to be part of the investigation when they were themselves accused in the same case. All this involves the overt and covert support of the full range of government machinery, the police, the courts, the administration - this is how it all works. Sheer terrorism disguised as democracy. And I haven't even begun to talk about what's happening in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa.

**The point is that when people feel they have**

**nowhere to turn for justice, and that they can be jailed, raped and butchered even when they have done nothing at all, then why should they not fight back? When the whole elaborate machinery of this democracy fails you at every stage, why not fight back? Is it surprising that in a quarter of India's districts, the State has no control?**

To talk specifics, in the investigations into the Parliament attack case, there were a lot of discrepancies, as the courts have pointed out, but no action or inquiry was initiated against the investigators.

Intelligence agencies are powerful. They have a network of informers. They use journalists to plant stories in the press and create a certain climate. A climate in which the courts can come out and say things like "the collective conscience of society will only be satisfied if capital punishment is awarded to the offender" (as observed by the Supreme Court in its judgement against Parliament attack accused Mohammad Afzal Guru). This complete impunity is getting alarming.

**So there is no accountability. The intelligence agencies know that whatever they do, they will get away with it?**

Intelligence agencies operate like this all over the world, it's in their nature, whether it's the Mossad, the CIA, the KGB, the ISI or RAW. They are the hit-men of the establishment. They operate in the dark. The point is, how much play are they going to be given? Are they going to be allowed to go nuts? In Kashmir, false encounters and even massacres have stopped shocking people - they enrage, but they don't shock. Now it's spilling into the plains. Andhra, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Bombay. Of course, it's happened in West Bengal during the first Naxal uprising in the late 60s, in Punjab in the 80s, in Manipur since 1947. In these covert killings, nobody knows who is killing whom, no one knows who is on which side.

With the judiciary overlooking shoddy investigations, doesn't it give intelligence and investigative agencies the wrong signal? That they can get away with a bad investigation? We live in times in which no kind of judicial

rigour is necessary. Not for cases like the attack on Parliament or at Red Fort. It was all done with flag-waving, tub-thumping nationalistic fervour. But unless the pressure comes from us, from the people, unless we insist on asking the hard questions, we can't blame them for doing what they do. But when these institutions fail, when the government tries to control people by force, with guns and policemen and soldiers, things will fall apart. Of course there's never going to be an ideal situation in which there's peace on earth and we celebrate the brotherhood of man and the sisterhood of women. But we have the right to dream. Do we want things to get worse or better? This kind of cleverly hidden brutality may work for a while, but some day it will explode in our faces. It has begun. Blowback is a theme that doesn't only apply to the US.

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**P.S.**

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