

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D.

## ARUNDHATI ROY

**Born** 1961, Shillong, India

### Life

Arundhati Roy was born in the hill-station town of Shillong, in what was then Assam and its now the state of Meghalaya. Her mother, a Syrian Christian from Kerala, was a campaigner for women's rights, and her father, a Bengali Hindu from Calcutta, was a manager of a tea plantation near Shillong. She lived for a while with a grandfather in Tamil Nadu and then moved with her mother to the state of Kerala on the southwest coast. She was educated at a Christian school in Kottayam, in Kerala, then a British school in Tamil Nadu and finally at an architectural college in New Delhi, where she met and married Gerard da Cunha, with whom she lived in Goa for several years before separating.

She moved back to New Delhi and supported herself by writing film scripts, which introduced her to Pradip Krishen, a film-maker, who became her second husband. Amid her script-writing, she became active in national and international politics, supporting leftist causes, such as environmental opposition to dams and mining, and the armed resistance by tribal groups to their loss of land. Her life changed almost overnight when she published *The God of Small Things* (1997) and it won the Booker prize. She was the first non-expatriate Indian and the first Indian woman to win the award. Her second novel (*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*) was published twenty years later and received high praise, although not the acclaim accorded to her first novel. In the intervening years, Roy had been active on the international stage, supporting the Palestinian cause and the Kashmiri right to succession, while criticising US intervention in Afghanistan and India's nuclear policy. Her very vocal support for the Naxalite uprising among tribal groups in central India led to her being charged with sedition, although the charges were later dropped. She has published numerous essays and non-fiction books, and continues to fight for human and environmental rights. She has donated all her (considerable) prize money and royalties to these causes.

### Achievements

Her first novel, *The God of Small Things*, won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1997. Before that, she won the National Film Award for Best Screenplay in 1989. Her humanitarian work was honoured in 2002, when she won the Lannan Foundation's Cultural Freedom Award. In 2004, she was given the Sydney Peace Prize for her work in social campaigns and her advocacy of non-violence. Back home in India, in 2006, she was given the Sahitya Akademi Award from India's Academy of Letters, for her collection of essays on contemporary issues. However, she refused to accept it, saying that the Indian government had compromised itself by its economic and foreign policies. In 2011, she was awarded the Norman Mailer Prize for Distinguished Writing.

### List of works

#### Novels

*The God of Small Things* (1997)  
*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017)

#### Non-fiction

*The End of Imagination* (1998)  
*The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002)  
*The Greater Common Good* (1999)  
*The Cost of Living* (1999)  
*Power Politics* (2002)  
*The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile* (2004, with David Barsamian)  
*Kashmir: The Case for Freedom* (2011)