Integral Research
(ISSN: 3048-5991) Coden: IRABCA

Book Review
(Peer-reviewed, Open Access & Indexed Multidisciplinary Journal)
Journal home page: https://integralresearch.in/
Vol. 02, No. 10, October. 2025

# The Shelter, the Storm, and the Gangster: A Review of Arundhati Roy's Memoir Mother Mary Comes to Me

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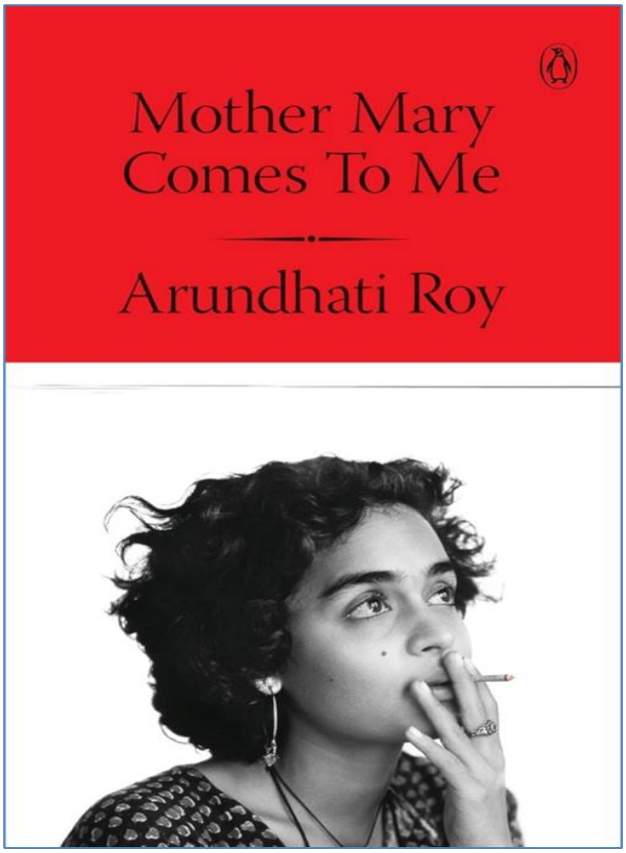


A few littérateurs trespass the traditional limits of time, space and action. They are fond of doing so. Their affection urges them to transcend these stipulated lines and stirs them to set their own. Whatever they set, if good, becomes universal, always supporting the universe, and if bad, becomes a barrier, always bringing bedlam within the nation and beyond. This may be one of their tricks with publicity, but with the strength of their untampered soul, the way they handle all the differences they bring is miraculous and moving. They all go away with a Mona Lisa smile. Their verbs propel them in verve without reflecting on their subsequent impacts on society and on themselves. One of the brightest examples of such an impression is Arundhati Roy, a Booker winner of 1997. Her literary corpus, the dictums of proving what human existence, in particular, human essence, is, since the very first of her novels, *The God of Small Things* (1997), until the most recent memoir, *Mother Mary Comes to Me* (2025), is a continuous investigation into the consideration that should be between human beings. To this end, she tends to push the boundaries as noted above, implementing the triad of self-invented principles: destruction, generation, and preservation. She is frequently observed to annihilate every such conception in her works which in some way appears to distort society, and afterward she is observed to conserve such concepts of her own which she creates in the middle of things, doing well on behalf of society.

However, the book that Roy has recently published, *Mother Mary Comes to Me* (2025), is not only a memoir. It is a remembrance dome, a requiem of resolution, an account of confrontation, and a condensate of cogitative understanding of the Indian literary situation that, crossing the boundary of nonfiction, astounds the critics and the scholars in full blast. She added a new twist to the genre by going against the tendency of inflating the vainglory and the family ensnarling, which are among the most prevalent themes in autobiographies written in India. By keeping out of the way of these culpabilities she followed the course which led her memoir to a point where the character of the sweet and sour memories of relationships between mother and daughter comes to a meeting-place with no mistaking clarity. The appeal of the book

Received **10 October 2025**; Accepted **25 October 2025**. Available online: **30 October 2025**. Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension) 

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lies on its fact of convincing its readers to forget the obligations of their commonplace life and to dive into the esoteric rhythms of her memory that lead up to the concluding page of the memoir as it leads down to the initial one. They absorb the mavens of her surface and the challenges and endurance which her spirit was flaming with.

Moreover, the memoir by Roy is a non-fictional piece of writing that, in its extraordinary way, is made of the pulse of a novel, the intimacy of a diary, and the urgency of a political testimony in a single design. Her literary vitality was decisive in the genius of the creation of this book. It allowed her to keep her thoughts precise during her cadence when addressing difficult topics. Yet it is, at bottom, an ode to her mother—a woman of unconquerable spirit, uncompromising belief, and ruthless tenderness—but telling the mesmerizing tales of the daughter, her skirmishes, anxieties, and arousals. This literary indulgence, coupled with a literary ultimatum, is a residue of the themes already found in her previous works, which are charged with alchemical metaphor. The work that has surfaced is not merely a biography of an outstanding woman and an outstanding daughter but also a commentary on sovereignty, insurgency, and the eternal struggle to find the authenticity.

**Against the Current: A Life in Defiance**

Defiantly going against the tide is the kind of thing Roy would do. Whether it is her personal life or political life, they all have the same story. Her life has always been rebellious. *Mothers Mary Comes to Me* (2025) of her memoir is circular. It starts when life stops, when the mother is dead, and it stops where life starts, where she recalls the departed soul of whom she is to pass her rest life. The whole text is haunted by the shadow of the same loss. But this is not the festooned fashion of the book, it is completely naked. There is no embellishment to her resistance and no confusion of course. Whatever she puts across lacks any drift; it is the blessing of her choice that selects her fortune. Her life is not accidental; it is a question of will—hard wills that at each turn are shaping her life, making her destiny. Fate is not written in the stars, but in her hands, and with each movement, it presents fresh direction. The fact that she left her home at eighteen, over a dispute with her mother; that she had participated in demonstrations against the Sardar Sarovar Dam, and that she had gone into the woods of Dandakaranya to take shelter with the insurgents of the Naxalites are acts which declare the modus of her being and the insistence of her will. It is perceived by just reading between the lines of this memoir that her life has always been one of calculated nonconformity. The reason is loud and clear. She does not see it as recklessness on her part, but as one of the best alternative ways of surviving. It stands for no stunt in her dictionary; it is a need of the day for her to breathe. What the world calls folly becomes her soul's defense in the addendum of this volume. In its pages, insurgency and belonging meet in strife. Every rupture rests on reconciliation. And every deed abides with the weight of fate rather than the conceit of choice. The memoir is less about recounting events and more about staging the inner strife that she not only felt but also bore. However, they compelled her to move in such directions that others dared not.

**From Silent Actress to Relentless Writer**

The memoir *Mother Mary Comes to Me* follows Roy as she moves away from her childhood in cinema into becoming one of the most unique voices in the literary world. The quiet heroine of Massey Sahib (1985) turns out to be the scriptwriter of the movie in which Annie Gives It Those Ones (1989) and Electric Moon

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(1992). She does not describe these makeovers as milestones in her career but as episodes of self-liberation, when her silence would be replaced by her voice and vice versa. Such inscriptions are not ineludibly imbued with nostalgia, yet very frequently with a merciless directness which is anti-mythologizing and transforms her individuality into that plurality which is perceived to be the property of "the Look and the Other" as the existentialists suggest. But every memory, personal, social, or even economic, is subject to her unfolding stare of hypocrisy. The integrity she gives herself by not veiling her past gives her story that invaluable integrity; it is the truth itself, and it thus becomes the cafeteria of her existence and essence, which must cause the bibliophiles to turn the page by the page like the bees lapping their lips with petals.

A Daughter's Spectator: Love, Conflict, and Regard

One of the most moving in the memoir is the bond that exists between the memoirist, Arundhati Roy, and her mother, Mrs. Roy. Although it is written in fragments, in anecdotes, in stories, it is a brilliant light on the love she was given in pieces. The book reflects all its contradictions, all its insolence, and all its conflicting sides to the very core. The memoirist is never afraid of revealing the hard corner of her life. She recollects how her mother was a hard lady, how she had a temper beyond capitulation, and how rigid she used to be with her children in the better interest. In this regard, as a case in point, Roy talks about an experience in her life, when she was only fourteen years old. What transpired was that her mother once abruptly asked her to get out of her moving car on the highway at night. Her word "get out" was a bolt from the blue for the memoirist. However, she got back to the same place after an hour of the night, but this episode was absurd for her. She realized that she was compelled and it is testified in her writing: "I had no intentions other than sit on that milestone rest of my life" (Roy 68). The strings of her memories do not halt here. They are lasting in duration. They keep on recapping her of the extraordinary temerity of her mother: her insistence on her daughters to hold onto their property, her resistance to the totalitarian decrees of so-called local authorities, who attempted to prohibit the school plays, her own life that was never ceasing in its efforts of upholding uncompromising authenticity. Through the narrations of these episodes, one can see a woman who had been shelter and storm to children, kind and cruel, but complex and flawed, yet magnificent. And yet Roy adores these complications even though it breaks her heart.

**Personal Pandemonium and Public Pluck**

The memoir is honest in the setting of the dreamy liaison and introspective battles of Roy. It brings them temptingly forth. This is either her first love or it is her early marriage and early break up, whether it is her subsequent affair with the director of Massey Sahib or not, everything leads to the same narrative of personal messiness and societal specialization. These descriptions are not effused in confession, but written in record—preferred, distinguished, and revised. They are not to be pitied but to be judged. In them one has how mayhem renders thought acutely sensitive to the exterior. It is not hard to establish herself as a writer and an activist. This is accompanied by her reckoning and those made by her mother, who, in the company of her own reckoning, stands, as it were, above the law, regardless of principle. She struggled against what tradition had refused, against female bequest, dissent, and discourse. Where society had had silence, she had made answer. Their lives make no cry—but an example. Roy makes such narratives close to one another and lets her readers see the reflection of personal and the public life. Both the women—whether it is Roy or her mother—are seen in conflict in various spheres, but their conflict reverberates through the ages.

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**The Poverty of Belonging**

The corridor of the present memoir has several adjacent closets of memories. Some of them are pleasant, and some are unpleasant. The latter ones are better than the former ones. They depict Roy's musings on her poverty and alienation. In one of the Vignettes, she writes: "To be absolutely alone in the world, with almost no money, made me rigid with anxiety. However, the idea of returning home to Mrs. Roy was not something I even considered" (Roy 69). What she tries to convince through these lines is nothing but the dilemmas of poverty and loneliness in which she is cynically caught. Loneliness is something that Roy learns to do in the absence of comfort. It commands her thought, and eventually her behavior. She did not want to go back home out of pride, she needed to. She preferred starvation to begging, not to illustrate anything, but to hold back her feet. For her, to rely on was to lose. This openness—of money and fear and the price of standing alone—presents a cut to the illusions which are frequently shrouded over orators. It takes off the symbol and reveals the individual. There is risk even behind the voice. Behind the name a life is a life paid out.

Forty Vignettes of a Restive Life

The book consists of forty vignettes—each of them being a fragment but also the part of the complete structure. Interspersed with some flashes of memory and premonition, the memoir illustrates the chronicle of her personal and self-mythology transporting a shattered home to turbulent politics. But Roy's memory has no straight flight. Sometimes it moves in shards of light and sometimes in lumps of darkness. While ascertaining them, it emulates them in her memoir. The fusion of these conflicting things makes the memoir special. Further, she is scornful of the lie of success and holds on to shatter. This is because she believes that the truth is serrated and serrated shards cut deeper. In this way she creates no heroic figure, only a mirror twisted, shattered, and particularly human in its journey.

**The Polemics: Smoke and Mirrors**

Controversy is chronic with Roy. As expected, the book has been controversial. One of the areas that have been subjects of polemic in the book has been the front cover that contains a photograph of Roy smoking a *bidi* or cigarette. For some, this gesture of hers may be no more than a trick to get more publicity than the celebs usually do. And in her career—both as an activist and writer—she has done so many times, ridiculing the Indian ethos. And to others, it may be just a form of cultural materialism, which continually aims at dissecting the cultural phenomenon existing within Indian families—particularly between a mother and her daughter. But to them, her smoking had been more scandalous than the injustices that she had been struggling with in her life. Roy is passive to such reactions. The memoir is freely calling them for their critique as it is not to imitate the prescribed standards of the patriarchy that often teach how and what "a woman writer" should reveal. As for the image, her words disturb them more than her image does. However, she spares none—even to herself. What she observes, she writes as it is. In her dictionary, honesty is not a courtesy, but a command. This is why her style enables her literary veneer. She writes unmasked, without embellishment. Everything is sharp, spare, and bold. The pages she writes on refuse comfort but cannot pass by; because, though crude, verity is more potent than creation.

**Love, Estrangement, and Homecoming**

Roy's return to her mother after eight years of dispassion is the acme of the memoir. It shows that she had walked away in anger and rebellion, but then, as she came back, she was drawn back. She had to stay with

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her mother despite their constant quarrels, reproaches, and chastisement. This contradiction, of separation and yet reunions, of revolt and still abiding becomes the emotive core of the tome. Roy portrays herself as a daughter who did not manage to turn her back on her mother, even though her love was very cruel. This love, estrangement, and reunion are persuasively transmitted through a conversation between Roy, the memoirist, and Mrs. Roy, her mother. The late (2022) Mary Roy had asthma. Its assaults were unexpected. As there was a threat of a death, she would often ask her daughter: "What will you do now, little girl? Correspondently to which Roy, the writer, ever answered: "I'll breathe for you, Mama." In feeling the temperature of these lines, one discovers that it is no betrothal with false heart. It is a verity of a daughter toward her beloved mother. In that regard, she pens: "I tried to breathe for her. I became one of her valiant organs, a secret operative, breathing my life into her" (Roy 34). These lines initiate the reader into a relationship which is not built on gratified ground, but a fact one on the complex relation between mother and daughter. Humanism in her does not come out of the theory, but of experiment. It is not a belief; it is practice. It does not provide her with an escape, but a demand, to be honest, to be whole. The rigidity of her mother did not destroy her; it made her. Through misery, she gained courage. Out of dilemma she made sense. Not love had moulded her, but perseverance—and out of perseverance she had made a personality that will twinkle for eternities. This is what started as a daughterly ordeal that came to the fore as a creed of the fighter that she holds even to date. Her home was her initial battleground, and the mother her initial enemy; and she created a formidable power out of those blows to defend the dispossessed, and resist injustice.

**A Closing Benediction**

The memoir closes with an earnest recall: "In these pages, my mother, my gangster, shall live. She was my shelter and my storm" (Roy 376). Nothing is more charged with emotion than this is. On the one hand, the epithet "my gangster" can be paradoxed in a domestic context, but on the other, it also combines respect and resistance and love and harshness, as the concept of affection has no borders in language. Moreover, this title describes the figure of the mother as an amalgamation of the apparently contradictory qualities: sheltering and resilient, instructive and restrictive, caring and overwhelming. And to write about such one, the memoirist thinks of her duty, not sentiment. However, in this reminiscence, the end is not aesthetic gratification but justice, the rightful use of memory is to recover that to which an irrepressible advance of time might have been destroyed. The composition thus requires a prudent evaluation rather than an appeal to sentiment, not as a development of passion, but as a devotion to the truth. The story attempts to protect the spirit of life against obsolescence, thus giving a role model that dictated the thoughts and behavior of the writer, i.e., the text is then an archivistic soberness of the fact that the meritorious live on and not disappear in obscurity. The author achieves a moral cause by including the name in the annals, continuing with virtue by means of an intellectual pursuit. Incarcerating her in prose, the author grants her another life body, i.e., the contemplative memory, as opposed to the sentimentality. So, the endurance of the mother is not by the fervent story telling but by the work of meditation and the clockwork of record keeping.

**Conclusion: Beyond Memoir, Toward Legacy**

The Memoir is not just the story of a relationship between Arundhati Roy and her mother, but a book that by introducing personal stories and self-mythologies will make the readers redefine the concept of love,

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insurgency and fidelity. It shows the deceit of a culture that strives to policewomen in making a choice without digging deeper to know what was being said to them to do. The book elucidates the exclusive nature of personal suffering and commitment to politics, where personal suffering can become a mechanism to become a unifying force. The style of the book is arresting and enthusiastic. It is so human that it makes her vision easily reach to the readers without any pain. Besides, the book traces her language progression and shows that no specific language can become the complete embodiment of the works of a writer. The range of her expressions never traverses the linguistic boundaries without reason, which means that no language can be adequately used to discuss the richness of the text. Nevertheless, it is written in English, and the influences of the Malayalam, Hindi and European languages are coursing through it with symphonic synthesis. The content and style balance is subtle and makes the aesthetics of it unique, and the narrative and linguistic layers are not inappropriate with different connotations, which combined with each other form an effective reverberation. The reading becomes more than a memoir; it is more of an experience of a memoir of endurance which states that to live candidly is to be prepared to confront vulnerabilities. The book may shock people who are seeking some sort of comforting read and it is a profound shock to those who are inclined to provocation. Overall, the memoir is a tribute of a daughter, a confession of a writer, and a testament of an activist, which makes it clear that even memory itself may be a tool of resistance. Even injured love is the final gesture of defiance.

Note:
The image is abstracted from https://champaca.in/products/mother-mary-comes-to-me.

Reference:
Roy, Arundhati. *Mother Mary Comes to Me*. Penguin Hamish Hamilton, 2025.

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