Arundhati Roy, the Booker Prize-winning novelist, seeks to draw attention in her book, *Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers*, on India's state and society which according to her “often fall dreadfully short of the liberal, democratic ideals they profess” and where law shields the powerful and persecutes the weak.

The book is an uneven collection of essays, opinion pieces, speeches and other writings published between 2002 - when an estimated 2,000 Muslims were massacred in the western state of Gujarat - and the aftermath of last November's terror attacks in Mumbai. Roy calls the collection “a detailed under-view” of the darker side of the world's largest democracy - or what she describes as “the cunning, Brahmanical, intricate, bureaucratic, file-bound 'apply-through-through-the-proper channels' nature of governance and subjugation in India.”

She has pointed accusing fingers at corporate India for its greed and for its silence about human rights atrocities, at the media for ignoring the crisis she sees unfolding in the country, and at right-wing Hindus for channelling public anger into religious intolerance.

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

In the essay, "How deep shall we dig", a text of the lecture that she delivered at the Aligarh Muslim University in 2004, Roy has used Kashmir to establish the Indian government’s handling of terrorism along its margins.

"Azadi", another essay in the book gathers up a controversy where 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.

The concluding essay, "Nine is Not Eleven" (And November isn't September) is a spotlight on the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks and describes the horrors of the blasts, as beamed across by television channels and the post-mortems that followed the live coverage makes a pertinent point.

In a strand running through several essays, Arundhati Roy argues that the rise of Hindu nationalist extremism was inextricably linked to India's market-oriented economic development project of the past two decades.
She has pointed to India's persistently high rates of malnutrition, and rising tension over land, raising the question of whether India has either the capacity or will to improve the lives of its poorest citizens.

In her thought-provoking, well-researched and worth reading collection of essays, Arundhati Roy has dismissed the economic boom in India as having merely created “a vast middle class punch drunk on sudden wealth and the sudden respect that comes with it - and a much, much vaster desperate under class.”