

## **Brief report on 18<sup>th</sup> Annual BCF Lecture by Aruna Roy**

Topic: MKSS, The Right to Information Journey and its relevance for India.  
Date- 8<sup>th</sup> August 2019. Timings 4pm to 5:30pm. Venue: IIC Annexe Lecture  
Attended by 120 invitees

Aruna Roy in the lecture spoke about the journey of change in the political, social spaces, forms, knowledge etc. She started the lecture by pointing out towards the younger generation and their source of knowledge as for youth the incidents, events, knowledge comes as part of their course, from books. She uses the word “Rubaru” to introduce the familiarity and connectedness of herself/ people with same age as her, with the historical events, people affecting and engaging with the certain issues, ideas, ideologies etc. She talked about the Constitution as being an important political document which gives the guarantee and rights to the citizen. The document as per Roy is also important because of the feeling of ownership & rights one gets. When talking about constitution she made three important points:

- One, justice as the basis of the constitution cuts across all the boundaries, formations of caste, class, religion, ethnicity etc.
- Second, the constitution is the collective efforts of numerous debates, dialogues, conversations which shows the environment and space one used to get in those times unlike the recent times when the voices are continuously forced to shut.
- Third, the constitution is not just for the poor, marginalized, activists rather it’s for each and every person so that we can “know” and take informed decisions.

She introduced the Right to Information (RTI) which is an example of using the constitution for the betterment of structure/ society and it shows beautifully the involvement of people whether it’s about making the law or simply using it. The motive of RTI is to bring accountability and transparency in accessing government documents. It also extends its power to know about various processes, issues, events which otherwise would have been very difficult to ask. RTI helped in making knowledge and information more accessible to everyone.

This law is unique in nature because the idea of RTI comes from the lived experience of common people and based on bottom up model. The RTI is the law which came out of common people’s struggle and their everyday engagement. Aruna Roy mentions about the poor women who kept track of her single rupee even though she is illiterate, the accountability and the connectedness comes from such narratives. Another important reason is to bring

out the government documents, records in order to bring more transparency and make system more responsible as the “sarkari kagaz” (government papers) becomes the tool to harass and oppress marginalized people because of secrecy and corruption.

She also talked about MKSS, how MKSS as an organization started with the demand to increase wages and the forty day long protest created a movement in the country which resulted in the Right To information Act 2005. She explained that the organization works at grass-root level and runs with the money of people who believe in equality society and do not collect funding from Foreign sources, corporates, etc. As Activists they led simple lives in a mud hut.

In between she made the important point that for being intellectual one need not be literate which is the beauty of knowledge. Knowledge is the great source of power in society and RTI helps in empowering numerous people, organization and provides the tools to fight against the systemic hierarchy. RTI makes knowledge/ information accessible to everyone and legitimizes the question asked which provides the sense of belongingness and ownership over public resources, data, information etc and brings power to common people.

