



Portraying A Diverse Nation: Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness"

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Abstract:

Arundhati Roy uses elements of magic realism in her Booker Prize-winning first novel. The author's second novel, published in 2017, is a departure from the anti-global function of his first, 1997's *The God of Small Things*, focusing instead on beauty. The book's harsh criticism of movements like those fighting for anti-globalization, ecological preservation, nuclear disarmament, and land rights for the people of Kashmir is based on vulnerability tropes that influence both individuals and their environs. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* employs a kaleidoscopic style of storytelling by having a single omniscient narrator and several alternating first-person points of view. This piece examines how *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*'s hybrid narrative structure presents a story of decay and optimism set in modern India, complete with gender inequalities, caste prejudice, ruined landscapes, and religious disputes. Roy both warns and encourages her readers to explore the inconsistencies of modern postcolonial India through her use of Hindu epics on the one hand and the intellectual advocacy that is distinctive of her non-fiction writings on the other. Arundhati Roy reconceives the role of fiction as a reservoir of experiences at variance with dominant ways of knowing and existing in the modern world through her use of unresolved characters and unreconciled narrative language. She uses the harsh truth of her stories to question the dominance of Anglo-American writing and language.

Keywords: Arundhati Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, politics, post-colonialism, omniscient narrative, historical realism, gender issues.

Introduction:

Arundhati Roy is an Indian author, campaigner, and human rights advocate. *The God of Small Things*, her first story, was the best-selling book by a native Indian novelist in 1997. Although Arundhati Roy's parents were from Meghalaya, in north eastern India, she spent the majority of her youth in Kerala, in the country's extreme south. Her mother, Mary, was a Christian schoolteacher and campaigner from Malayali, Syria; her father, Rajib, was a Hindu Bengali in charge of the plantation's tea production. Over forty languages now have access to Arundhati Roy's Man Booker Prize-winning novel, *The God of Small Things*. Since then, she has written several books, such as *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, *Listening to Grasshoppers*, and *Shattered Republic*. A native of New Delhi, India, she made her debut in 1961. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, a novel written by Indian author Arundhati Roy in 2017, is a huge drama set in Delhi with a large cast of characters. It deals with some of the darkest and hardest times in recent Indian history, like the Godhra train attack in 2002 and the ongoing fighting in Kashmir.

A trans woman (or hijra), a designer at odds with society, and a business owner with a second life in the insight benefits are just a few of the characters from all walks of Indian life whose perspectives are used in *The Ministry of Utmost*

Happiness to look at the social conflicts and relationship clashes that drive modern Indian culture. There was a lot of praise for this book, and it was longlisted for two important literary awards: the Hindu Literary Award and the Man Booker Prize, but it did not sell as many copies as Roy's other novel, *The God of Small Things*. Arundhati Roy, through her factual writings, has become a voice for the downtrodden and voiceless. Her readers feel wounded and angered because her works inevitably veer into politics. Roy's desire to fight for the underdog and the outcast is one of his distinguishing traits. The subaltern identities of the novel's main protagonists, Ammu and Velutha, were instrumental in earning the author the Man Booker Prize. Ammu represents gender subalternity, and Velutha suffers from social subalternity in the tale. In it, the subjugation of both classes and gender is portrayed from a historical perspective. The first book's confined area mirrored that of the village of Ayemenam in Kottayam, Kerala State. In her second book, however, "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*," she widened her focus to include other major cities and regions in India, including Delhi, Gujarat, and Kashmir. The narrative centres on the transsexual protagonist Anjum, formerly known as Aftab. In the beginning of the novel, set in the 1950s, Jahanara Begum, a housewife in Delhi, enters into labour only to learn that her child is

hermaphrodite after she has waited six years, through three girls, for a baby son. Years later, a Hijra (a female imprisoned in a male body) was uncovered, but Aftab was content. Whereas other transgender people struggle with both society and their own selves in coming to terms with their identity, he didn't have to wage a battle within his own head.

Many of Aftab's transsexual acquaintances were located in Kwabgah. He manages to make everyone angry inside the home by doing chores for them. His newfound acceptance into the neighbourhood prompts him to abandon the moniker Aftab in favour of Anjum. Anjum was given a good life and didn't face any backlash from his neighbours. Perhaps the most significant contribution to the idea that sexual orientation is a social construct independent from but socially determined by natural sex and maintained through social practise was made by Judith Butler in 1990 with the publication of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. This material has established itself as the academic standard when discussing the potential of socially developed and erroneously limited sex. The feminist movement and queer theory both advocate for this idea and use it as a cornerstone. It is currently accepted, without bias, that sexual orientation norms and traditions are socially created and, as a result, open to sociological, geological, and historical change. This proposal starts with the premise that the social construction of sex is a given, and it proceeds to show that not only do a large and growing number of people self-identify as an option other than the parallel classes of man or 'lady,' but in some sociological areas, additional sexual orientations are perceived in writing, in more extensive social creations, and in some examples, by the state. Using Butler's writing as a springboard, I focus on the relationship between having an "aha!" moment about being a third sex and how that sex is portrayed and understood in the wider culture.

This inquiry delves deep into the issue of transgender abuse and identity problems, getting to the core of the gender identity conundrum. The degree to which an adult exhibits typically feminine or masculine characteristics corresponds to the socially constructed roles of men and women and thus suggests the individual's gender identification. Sexual orientation includes the psychological factor of gender identification. An umbrella term to signify individuals who defy rigid, binary gender constructions and who express or present a breaking and blurring of culturally prevalent stereotypically male and female roles is how Sibsankar Mal [2], author of "Let Us Live: Social Exclusion of the Hijra Community," defines transgender people. The Eunuchs are an odd bunch who don't conform to the standard. They are stripped of authority and prestige

because they do not conform to the gender standards of the dominant culture. They appear to be men on the outside but experience gender confusion on the inside. In this traditional community, age-old gender norms continue to be at the centre of their identity crisis. They are not only being refused accommodation for themselves but also for their families. They are limited in all facets of existence, including the intellectual, the economic, and the governmental. They may make it through life as models, but they will never cease looking for a way to stand out. The discrimination faced by Indian women is also investigated. Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak contends that "if in the context of colonial production, subalterns have no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in darkness" [3]. The cultural focus on male supremacy in Indian society places women in a subservient position to male powers. Both women and men have been rendered powerless by discrimination. The core of a misogynistic society is made up of stereotypical views that prioritise men over women. Women are still seen as lifeless dolls with no identity or direction who meander around idly. They are still living in an authoritarian society that places an undue burden on them. Because they don't stand out, they're subject to continuous sexual harassment and attack.

Women attempt to be heard all the time, but no one seems to pay attention to what they have to say. As a result of job bias, women are less likely to achieve economic security and legislative influence. They are ignored and given no recognition for their contributions because of this. They suffer from anxiety, prejudice, and a lack of sense of self and community because of these issues. Musa and Tilo, both working in the Ministry of Utmost Happiness, are cognizant of the fact that Musa's job as a militant in Kashmir would unavoidably result in his demise. What happened that night on the HB Shabeen, Roy explains, "was less love-making than regret." (362). As the two make out, Tilo thoughtfully holds back from inquiring about the revolver. Roy's sexual companions are continually forewarned that their lives are in danger and that their end is inevitable. *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* both focus on the lines that one cannot or should not cross—and yet those are the very lines that do get crossed, if only once in a while, and then that makes for the politics of those extraordinary stories," to quote Brinda Bose. (1998: 61). In perilous, forbidden, temporary, and ephemeral contexts, gemlike relationships often blossom: "For a fleeting moment, they were able to repudiate the world they lived in and summon forth another one, just as real." (362). Do you believe they would have the same emotional effect if these relationships lasted longer? Would the tales have the same effect if the couples' love didn't have to end in

tragedy? In an interview with Amy Goodman and Nermeen Shaikh, Roy discusses how happiness is transient and can be found in unexpected locations. (2017: n.p.). It's all about seizing that one fleeting moment, and Roy takes a devilish delight in creating the offbeat settings in her writing that upend expectations and produce sorrow with such charming humour and grace. It's the little victories that add up that you should celebrate. Specifically, Roy's recurrent subject of doomed love relationships is a commentary on the complexity of Indian society, in which pure and lovely moments occur in spite of the world rather than because of it. Aftab is a member of the Hijra or Kinnar, a group of individuals who identify as neither male nor female, and as a result, he was the target of ridicule from children. The stress Aftab experiences from trying to be a model citizen has negative effects on his emotional and bodily well-being. The gender of Aftab's corpse couldn't be determined. The struggles that Aftab experienced are emblematic of living in a society with essentialist views on gender. Pre-schoolers begin to form their sense of identity by identifying with the genders assigned to them by society. Some types of conduct are assumed to be unchanging regardless of a person's sex.

According to feminist theory, this kind of categorization only serves to reinforce existing gender disparities. Biologist Fausto Sterling [6] contends that sexual dimorphism is the norm. Her study of transgender children with complicated anatomy shows the challenge of defining gender with absolute certainty. Hermaphrodite (a person with both an ovary and testes), hermaphrodites (a male hermaphrodite who was reared with testes and certain characteristics of women's genitals), and a female hermaphrodite are the five sexes proposed by biologists like Fausto (who was raised with ovaries and certain features of male genitals). Aftab, a woman with a masculine body, chooses to transition to a female identity. Judith Butler contends that we should not see gender as something that is idly decided, describing the process as "a building of ourselves" [7]. By virtue of the body's position as a site of dialectical growth, what has been etched into tissue is given a new viewpoint on its historical meaning. It's like entering a new realm when you go from Aftab to Anjum. Her roommates are a varied bunch: some are Hindu, some are Muslim, and some are just plain opposed to the notion of surgical gender change. Subtly, we see the difference between Duniya, our world, and Hijra, the domain of the saints. According to what Anjum has learned, the Hijra were a select group endowed with the power to give both curses and favours. The absurdity is that those who were singled out for this power also find themselves on the fringes. At first, Aftab sees becoming Anjum as a way to break free from his own constraints. However, Anjum

frequently considers the plight of the Hijra, and she and others like her once called Kwabgah home. In this location, they were able to break free of their bodies and minds. A close acquaintance of Anjum's, Kulsoom Bi, relates the history of Kwabgah and the Hijra people, highlighting their central role in important Hindu myths and in the Imperial palace. People regarded and adored them for what they had accomplished and how they had benefited society as a whole. A universe apart from being wiped out of history entirely, Kulsoom argues, is "to be present in history, even as nothing more than a giggle." (Roy 2017, 51) Part of their long-standing identity is that they have always lived within and outside of society.

The second plot line tracks Tilotama and three guys (Musa Yewsi, Nagraj Hariharan, and Biplab Das Gupta) on their journeys. The three guys are completely smitten with her. Tilotama, an architect-turned-activist whose mother was a Christian Syrian nobleman She was a strong, capable lady who stood firm in her convictions and persevered despite enormous obstacles. She had personal reservations about publicly revealing that Tilo was her daughter. She compared her to an adopted daughter when describing her. Maryam Ipe reportedly took her in after discovering that she was the daughter of a coolie woman and having her raised at the Mount Carmel orphanage. Tiny and dark, she reminded me of a sesame kernel, so I gave her the Sanskrit name Tilottama (Roy 2017, 240). Much to Naga's family's dismay, she marries him. They've been married for fourteen years, but she's finally chosen to terminate it because she can't "keep her separate worlds hidden." Roy (2017, 231) His undergraduate roommate from Tilotama, Biplab Dasgupta, is the unbreakable connection between war-torn Srinagar and tranquil Delhi. In Srinagar, this close acquaintance served as the Deputy Head of Intelligence, and later, in Kabul, he was an ambassador. To emphasise how quickly and easily peace can change into conflict, Afghani refugee Biplab leases an apartment to Tilottama even though he considers the area of Delhi Avenue outside his window to be peaceful and traditional because it is not a location of war. A new kind of conflict has arrived in Delhi since Anjum returned from Gujarat, and Miss Jebeen is the second woman in Telangana to endure an act of rape perpetrated as a weapon against Maoist people. It has already been established that the civil discrepancy motivation behind the Ministry of Utmost Happiness is seen as aggressive; the author's voice describes the Delhi hospital where Tilottama has an abortion after returning from Kashmir as "like a warfare ward." However, in Delhi, there is no conflict other than the stereotypical conflict that pits the wealthy against the poor. Thus, Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* weaves a story that shows the

riffs and splits in human relationships but ultimately untangles the web by reuniting the characters, who, despite their many differences, find common ground and make peace.

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