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Highlighting the Subaltern Identity in the Novel *The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness* By Arundhati Roy

Abstract

The famous term Subaltern used by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a very dynamic term. This term cannot be seen just from a postcolonial perspective, and it can be applied to every unconsolated lot of this unjust world where to be weak is to be miserable. Roy's novel The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is essential in this regard. Applying the concept of subaltern (introduced by Spivak) on a transgender person, as highlighted in this novel, is the prime objective of this research paper. The researcher will endeavor to analyze how Roy, in this novel, has presented the miseries and pains of these subalterns and their struggle to survive in this oppressive environment, thereby urging the global audience to become a voice for these voiceless subalterns. This research endeavor will highlight the subaltern identities from the transgender community presented in this novel and the agonizing existence they are bound to accept in Post-Independence India.

Keywords: *Doubly colonized, excluded and displaced, Highlighting Subaltern Identity, Postcolonialism, Voice to Voiceless*

Introduction

It is a study matter of the current paper keeping the novel *The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness* (2017) written by Suzanna Arundhati Roy. The study has been selected to identify and analyze transgender communities' marginalized lifestyles and probe into the term "Subaltern" in the Postcolonial stigmatic frame. The main character of this novel is a transgender person representing a community being evaluated based on gender and other social parameters.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is an Indian literary critic, postcolonial theorist, and feminist critic. "Can the Subaltern Speak" (Spivak,1988) be her most influential theoretical work in the field of postcolonial studies? Spivak uses the concept of subaltern for the females who are outcast and alienated from the mainstream of the society based on biology, experience, discourse, social and economic condones. She raises the voice of these deprived people and talks about gender partiality, economic factors, and how western people segregate Indians and Asians.

Previously Subaltern (Gramsci, 1971) term was used by Italian scholar Antonio Gramsci in the perspective of postcolonial masses. He referred it to the unrepresented group of people in the society who cannot share their stories and raise their voices for fundamental rights. These classes may include peasants, workers, and other groups denied access to hegemonic power. This paper uses this concept for trans genders as they are doubly marginalized than any other social groups mentioned above, first by Gramsci than by Spivak.

British Colonized the Indian sub-continent and ruled from 1858 to 1947. They made them powerless by their powerful socioeconomics and political system. Most colonial policies and reforms were against the will and welfare of the people of India. Worst of all is "Criminal Tribes" Act 1871, which states, "Any eunuch....who appeared, dressed or ornamented like a woman in a public street or place, or who danced or played music, or took part in any public exhibition", be sentenced to up to two years of imprisonment plus a fine. This act disseminated transgender oppression as the insult added to injury when these underprivileged beings faced tyranny not only by their own country's fellow men, women but also by their trans-colleagues.

Suzana Arundhati Roy is an Indian writer and human rights activist. She wrote about the issues of violence, human rights discrimination, political injustices of Kashmir and the transgender community. She has been continuously living and serving Indian people with her literary and human rights works and openly opposes the construction of the Narmada Dam in Central India (Khan 1) in her essay 'The Greater Common Good'. It could be said that she speaks bluntly about the rights of people who always speak with shaky voices. She is an ideal candidate who can speak about subalterns, and Spivak can never object to her presentations.

The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness (2017) explores the politics of postcolonial India. It paints the themes of social inequalities, political violence, and religion. It also highlights gender identity through the point of view of various characters.

Spivak's ruling in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" is rightfully presented in a fictional form by Arundhati Roy in *The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness* (2017). She has given a face to Spivak's concept, and her contributions to making a mindset change are far more significant. She is living in India and fighting for the rights of human beings.

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Literature Review

This literature review focuses on South Asian literature and the research work, which brings to light the Subaltern and marginalized identities that are kicked out of a society based on gender. Nature created them as human beings with both the characteristics of male and female, but society falls them in the domain of Identity crises. It is not accepting them and has snatched their spaces. It will focus on the research work which deals with transgender people.

In her research, Duty and Desire at constant conflict in *The pregnant king* by Devtutt Pattanaik, Mital Falda writes about the "Indian society, where black is black and white is white, any shade in between is discarded as a misfit" (Falda 5). While telling the story from Mahabharata of a Pregnant King, the researcher defines duty and desire. He has to give an heir to the kingdom, so he gives birth to a son and fulfills his duty, but as a male person of that society, he cannot act like a mother. He showed his desire to act, think, feel, and feed like mother society laughed at him and rejected his kingdom. Ultimately, he drops his royalty and takes the path of a forest where there are no rules other than the rule of survival. This research article centers around gender queerness and identity crisis.

Ms. Subhra Roy's research is on Khuswant Singh's novel, *Dehli: a novel*. Her research *Romancing the Third Gender: Analysis of the Representing of the Transgender in Dehli: A Novel* has particular reference to the character of Bhagmti, a transgender person. According to her Doctor, "I am not sure; it is a bit of both" (Singh 29), so her twilight being was not accepted in society. Bhagmati's father handed her over to a group of hijras "You can take this one. It is one of you" (Singh 29). Singh explained the situation during the anti-Sikh massacre in 1984 when Baghmati, his friend, a transgender person, saved him.

It could be said that "Pregnant King" saved his nation after producing an heir, Baghmati saved a Sikh friend, and the protagonist of this novel, Anjum, saved the subaltern characters of Indian society. However, all of them have to face an opponent from all sets of society. "Pregnant king" has to leave his kingdom and takes the forest path, and Anjum is forced to live in the graveyard.

Above mentioned research articles help to build a stance for the present study paper, which is to be focused on identifying subaltern and marginalized groups. Roy proves a true disciple and champion of Spivak who accentuate the need for literature who could provide space to subalterns to speak because they are unable to speak and if they tried to speak no one has the patience to listen to them, so articulation of the feelings, desires, emotions, and sufferings of those low ranked people of the society is essential and postcolonial writers have to raise voice for them. Roy proves in the novel that transgenders have potential human beings of this society.

1.2. Research Methodology

This study is qualitative. It sketches out to probe India's historical, social, and cultural aspects within the life span of a marginalized transgender community in *The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness*. It explores these things with opinions, arguments, and reasons along with references. The main aim of this study is to analyze the text TMOUH written by Arundhati Roy to find out the subaltern identities of a society that is highly segregated into different segments based on gender identity, birth identities in a social setup. The transgender community is living at the lowest level in Indian society. It also analyzes India's social, economic, and cultural issues, as highlighted in the novel. It also discusses transgender as a subaltern in colonial and postcolonial times.

This research will provide an understanding among the readers towards the actions reactions of human behaviors chained with culturally restricted people. It is also beneficial for readers to develop an interest in the area of marginalization and subalternity.

The significance of the study lies in questioning the traditions and norms in India that push the community of transgenders towards the sideline, being marginalized or subaltern tag attaches to them. This study will see the past and present lives of transgender and then throw light on the future of these marginalized and doubly subaltern human beings. People of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh will better be understanding and address the issues of people who have been neglected for so long. "Criminal Tribes Act" is replaced now, but its practice is still visible in society. It is almost seventy-three years of getting independence from British colonial rule, but things have frozen for many communities as these were in the slavery days.

Questions

- It will answer the questions like
- How are they pushed to consider themselves as subaltern?
- How the society treats them?
- What are their problems and desires?
- What place should they be given in society?

Third gender: Subaltern identity in *The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness*

This paper will focus on the subaltern identity in the novel's main character, TMOUH, on the given framework of subalternity in Indian society. It will explore the concept of the Subaltern as given by Gayatri

Spivak in her essay *Can The Subaltern Speak?* published in the journal *Wedge* in 1985. The behavior of Indian society towards this character, who is the mouthpiece of the whole community, will be analyzed in this paper.

In this novel, Roy has presented a transgender Anjum who faces issues of marginalization and subalternity and is living in the graveyard out of the periphery of the hegemonic society. He is poor, desolated, and rejected in this society. He is displaced and isolated based on gender inequality in the novel, *The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness (2017)*.

Anjum is Hermaphrodite. According to Dr. Nabi, she " was a rare example of a Hermaphrodite, with both male and female characteristics" (Roy 16). She was marginalized by her family, society, and even by her group of transgenders under the assistance of Guru. First, she left her own family and began living with the family of transgender. When she could not earn for Guru in her old age, they pushed her to leave that place. Ultimately, she started to live in the graveyard with her dead relatives buried there for generations. Roy tells in an interview, "this is true in India that there has always been a space for Hijras ...it is marginalized space, but it is a space..." (2018).

Jahanara Begum is the mother of Anjum, and her reaction after knowing the true identity of her child was of shock, suicidal thoughts, and even killing her baby out of fear. Her mother knowingly hides the true identity of her child as she was afraid of the treatment of society towards transgenders. In Indian society, they beg at shrines, sing, and dance at weddings and childbirth. Most of them are pushed to adopt the profession of prostitution ultimately. They will be identified as Hijras, Kinar, and Kwajasiras. Her fears about the future of her child were correct. She was silenced by looking at the future fate of her child. Nobody would hear her voice. She knew that she would be silenced by patriarchal and cultural power.

She was confused and thought, "Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman. Everything except her baby".(Roy 8) Finally, she decided to call him her son in front of her husband, siblings, and surrounding areas and gave her boys the name Aftab. This is the start of her colonization. Her mother did not accept her with what she was born with. When Aftab was five, he began to attend the "Urdu Hindi madrassa for boys" (Roy 11) He was forced to dress and behave like boy's opposite of her instincts. So it is undeniable that Anjum's birth was a stigma of shame for her family.

His mother knows her child will not be accepted with what she was born with "She knew that she had run out of time.... told her husband, breaking down and weeping with a grief and are relief...." (Roy 12)

Father usually plays a positive role in the physical and emotional development of a child. Aftab's father, Mulakat Ali, "was an Hakim a doctor of herbal medicine, and a lover of Urdu and Persian Poetry" (Roy13) plays a negative role in his life. He never accepted his identity as a Trans child. He never supported him physically, mentally, and financially. After hearing the news from his wife about the actual biological sex of his child, "It took a while to get over the initial shock" (Roy 16) than they showed him to a sexologist Dr. Ghulam Nabi who diagnosis in him, "Hijra tendencies that were unlikely ever to go away" (Roy 17) but Mulakat Ali did not accept this and forbade him to sing and dance strictly. His reaction to Aftab's true identity was teasing for him. He pressurized him to adopt male gender behaviors as he was trying to change his natural tendencies by telling him, "Stories about their warrior ancestors and their velour on the battlefield. They left Aftab unmoved". (Roy 17)

His family pride was damaged by it. He tried to silence him. It could be an example of epistemic violence. His father thought that Aftab was a "misfortune that had befallen the dynasty of Changaz khan." (Roy 25)

First, Mulakat Ali tried to get his son any medical treatment to cure his double sex, then he tried to transfer manliness in him, and in the end, he stopped talking to him, even they came face to face in the streets.

The unawareness of dichotomous distinctions in gender affects them, and they started the process of Othering, their child. It can be said that in her family, Aftab was the Other because of having that "in-between" characteristics.

Her family tried to suppress her female identity, and, in this sense, they deliberately tried to colonize her body, soul, and sexuality. Ankali Assumi says that " The in-between" identity of Anjum and her" patched together" body depicts the cultural conflict of the colonized countries after colonization."(Assumi 56). Like the people of the Indian sub-continent are "in-between," they are living in the east but like western skin color, dress, language etc.

Aftab started to attend music classes as he had a sweet singing voice and could pick up a tune after hearing it once. Later on, he had to stop these classes as other children began to tease him, stating, "He's not He or a She He's a He and a She. She-He She Hee ! Hee! Hee!" (Roy12). This social pressure outcasted him from the mainstream of society based on gender. He quit going outside and started to stay at home.

One evening, Aftab saw the first time a hijra in her street. He "... Saw a tall, slim-hipped woman wearing bright lipstick, gold high heels, and a shiny, green satin shalwar kameez buying bangles...hairclips, guavas, and hairclips...He wanted to be her" (Roy 18)

At fourteen, Aftab left his house for “another universe” and started to live with Hijras in Khwabgah.

Ustad Kulsoom Bi, “Wily old she-wolf” (Roy 35), was an aged hijra. He was running the matter of Khwabgah. He was the guru, maker, and imposer of the rules and regulations in Khwabgah. He was very clever and experienced. He welcomed Anjum in her Gharana, “The Delhi Gharana, one of the seven regional Hijra Gharanas in the country, each headed by a Nayak, a Chief, all of them headed by a Supreme Chief.” (Roy 25) He gave her name, Anjum.

Poverty is everywhere in Khwabgah. Roy describes the peeling walls and broken roofs of the Khwabgah like this, “There were two rooms set behind a deep verandah with fluted columns. The roof of one of the rooms had caved in and its walls had crumbled into a heap of rubble in which a family of cats had made its home.” (Roy 20)

Now he was called Anjum instead of Aftab. He thought it was his place of freedom where she could wear dresses of her own choice, “ she long to wear- the sequined, gossamer kurtas and pleated Patiala shalwars, shararas, silver anklets, glass bangles, and dangling earrings” (20)

The connections with these subalterns were a sign of shame for ordinary men. However, they visit this place at night time after the approval of Guru. Sometimes they have to beg because they are the only breadwinners of themselves from childhood till old age.

Roy portrays her because she was marginalized by her family, deserted by society, and excluded by her gender groups under the assistance of Guru.

She was forty years old when she announced that she wanted to leave that place. Gujrat Riots became a source of transience in his personality. Anjum loved Zainab as her daughter. However, she accidentally got stuck in Gujarat riots for two months, which became the separation between them. Anjum was very upset and planned to leave this place. A group of transgender showed her to a Doctor who wrote on the prescription pad, Dr. Bhagat wrote, “Patient formerly of outgoing, obedient, jolly-type nature now exhibits disobedient, revolting – type personality” (Roy 56)

Gujarat pogrom spared Anjum because they believed that killing a hijra would bring them bad luck. Anjum fell outside of either of those frames. Hers was neither a life to be protected nor destroyed.

“I’m not Everyone,” Anjum said”. (Roy 29) Anjum had a different thought about life now. She wanted to be independent and to do something for her community. She wanted to return to the Duniya and live like an ordinary person. She wanted to be a mother, to wake up in her own home, dress Zainab in a school uniform and send her off to school with her books and tiffin box. The question was, were ambitions such as these, on the part of someone like herself, reasonable or unreasonable? (Roy 29)

Anjum lived in the Khwabgah with her patched-together body for more than thirty years. At the age of forty- six heartbroken Anjum left the Khwabgah. Her father had died, and her mother was bedridden. She found her dwelling place in a graveyard and lived there next to her father for the rest of her life.

Anjum represents all those hair as (trans genders) in the Indian society who are maltreated, insulted, and denied all the facilities of life to survive. They are never considered human. Their life is always a source of fun for those who are so-called respectable families. Roy tells in an interview, “This is true in India that there has always been a space for the Hijras...it is a marginalized space, but it is a space...” (2018).

When people called her names—clown without a circus, queen without a palace —she let the hurt blow through her branches like a breeze and used the music of her rustling leaves as a balm to ease the pain. (Roy 3) People make fun of Anjum’s name, and she says the bitter reality of her life simply smiling, “It doesn’t matter. I’m all of them, I’m Romi and Juli, I’m Laila and Majnu. And Mujna, why not?” (Roy 4) She shows her pride in herself, “who says my name is Anjum? I’m not Anjum, I’m Anjuman. I’m a mehfil, I’m a gathering. Of everybody and nobody, of everything and nothing.” (Roy 4) Roy presents the pain of Anjum’s heart when blind Imam asks what type of her funeral would be after her death, what they would do with her whether give her coffin of a man or woman. Anjum replies, where do old birds go to die? Do they fall on us like stones from the sky? Do we stumble on their bodies in the streets? Do you not think that the All-Seeing, Almighty One who put us on this Earth has made proper arrangements to take us away? (Roy 5) Roy presents the subaltern characters in such a society that has no compassion for the third gender. Society forces Anjum to live in the graveyard. Anjum’s life in the graveyard shows that she has nowhere to have a place to live. She has to sleep in between graves and keep her belongings there. Anjum was always considered a “low ranked” person in society. Anjum’s struggles to tell the world that she was not like all ordinary men and women, and her cries to demand her rights as human and whatever she was were never listened to by the world.

Unlike other transgenders, Aftab was a fortune in a sense as he had not been subjected to by her unconventional Muslim parents, siblings, and neighbors before she left home (Roy 26), but they were all the time snatching his identity. They did not understand his desires and nature.

She had to fight against gender decimations and hierarchies, accept gendered norms, and be part of the anti-colonial resistance. She had to fight against the forces which were only developed in the society of class, status, and so-called honor-conscious people. Gujarat pogrom spared Anjum because they believed that killing a hijra would bring them bad luck. Anjum fell outside of either of those frames. Hers was neither a life to be protected nor destroyed.

"I'm not everyone," Anjum said". (Roy 29) as she had a different thought about life now. She wanted to be independent and to do something for her community. She wanted to return to the Duniya and live like an ordinary person. She wanted to be a mother, to wake up in her own home, dress Zainab in a school uniform and send her off to school with her books and tiffin box. The question was, were ambitions such as these, on the part of someone like herself, reasonable or unreasonable? (Roy 29) On the other, Anjum's social marginality was increased with the lack of alternatives available to her. Even her illegality was found insignificant. She told officials who stuck a notice of illegal construction in the graveyard that "She was not living there rather she was dying in it." (Roy 67).

Spivak reiterates in her writings that the subalterns were made to believe that they belonged to an inferior race and so not fit for making any real contribution to society. He decided to create something, a living creature that is incapable of happiness. So, he made us" (Roy 23) Who's happy here? It's all sham and fakery". "No one's happy here. The riot is inside us. The war is inside us. IndoPak is inside us. It will never settle down. It can't. (Roy 23). Spivak defines in *Transgender Studies Reader* (2006). The subalterns as "A deviation from an idea... which is itself defined as a difference from the elite." (Ashcroft 27).

She built a hut in the start. Later "Anjum's tin shack scaled up. It grew first into a hut that could accommodate a bed, and then into a small house with a little kitchen." (Roy 66) Over time, she enclosed the graves of her relatives, built rooms on them, and started giving rooms on rent, but the tenant should be subalterns like her. "Gradually Jannat Guest House became a hub for Hijras who, for one reason or another, had fallen out of, or been expelled from, the tightly administered grid of Hijra Gharanas." (Roy 68) The Jannat House also provides funeral services to those denied by society or even refused to bury.

Conclusion

The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness (2017) by Arundhati Roy is an ample example of subaltern transgender identities in India. Roy deals with these characters from pre-partition in the Sub-continent to the 21st century. As Spivak says in her essay "Can the subaltern speak," the literature must provide them a channel to speak and give voice to the voiceless. This paper comprehensively and appealingly highlights the subaltern identities. Anjum, the torchbearer for transgender, first built Jannat Guest House and funeral service and then worked to provide the services only to those with no identities. "The one clear criterion was that Jannat Funeral Services would only bury those whom the graveyards and imams of the Duniya had rejected." (Roy 80). Jannat Guest House was also a source of everlasting harmony and gratification. There were no unjust laws and no oppressive rulers but only ordinary people who aspired to co-exist peacefully and allowed each other to live a peaceful life. Anjum is not only a Hermaphrodite but also a rare example of a subaltern transgender who decides to help the poor and finally achieves the goal. "That little act of redistribution made her feel much better. She looked back at Jannat Guest House with a sense of contentment and accomplishment. In the 21 century, their status has not changed as such. Roy has spoken for these uncounseled lots and has quite strongly urged the audience to speak for them for the sake of humanity.

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