

## FRAGMENTED NARRATIVES, UNIFIED STRUGGLES: THE SUBALTERN IN 'THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS' BY ARUNDHATI ROY

**Ayesha Raj**

Mphil- Riphah International University

[ayesharaj1004@gmail.com](mailto:ayesharaj1004@gmail.com)

**Mamoona Manzoor**

Mphil-Riphah International University

[mamoona.manzoor032@gmail.com](mailto:mamoona.manzoor032@gmail.com)

**Sidra Saeed**

Mphil- Riphah International University

[saeedsidra1018@gmail.com](mailto:saeedsidra1018@gmail.com)

### **Abstract:**

*Post-colonial theory has remained one of the most appealing academic topics of study since the Indian subcontinent gained independence from colonial rule. The term "subaltern" is a product of the post-colonial era, which has given rise to a vast body of literature. The definition and features connected with the term "subaltern" have changed dramatically as a result of socioeconomic conditions. Arundhati Roy, a conscious writer, has focused her second novel, "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness", on contemporary socio-political issues that are pertinent to the study of "subaltern," particularly in the South Asian context. As the work is dedicated to "The Unconsoled," it is essentially about everyone and everything happening in quickly changing India, notably about displaced and marginalised people. Transgender issues were raised by the protagonist or primary character of the literature. Other persistent issues such as gender discrimination, caste inequity, capitalism, and a slew of other sociopolitical issues were also addressed. S Roy is a prolific author who has written works on capitalism, globalization, and democracy. As a result, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is definitely and instinctively an explosion of the author's observations of "The New Subaltern" who are victims of social and political injustice. As a result, the purpose of this article is to look at Roy's portrayal of "The New Subaltern" in a democratic India setting through her characters, who are framed in a post-colonial position.*

**Key words:** the new subaltern, transgender, caste problem, third world women, socio-political unfair.

### **Introduction:**

Arundhati Roy (2017), an outstanding novelist, needs no introduction. Individuals have been hanging tight twenty years for Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" (Knopf) an amazing book that has roused a storm of criticism among critics due to her remarkable non – fiction writing. At the point when Roy was in her thirties, she played out some acting and screenwriting (she had hitched a filmmaker, Pradip Krishen), however she says her significant source of income was as an aerobics instructor. She'd likewise gone through the past five years dealing with a book. "The God of Small Things," her first novel, was published in 1997. In practically no time, it had sold 400,000 duplicates and won the Booker Prize, which had never been conceded to an Indian lady or a non-exile Indian. Roy became, likely still is, the most perceived writer on the subcontinent, which is a surprising accomplishment given that, following "The God of Small Things," she turned out to be so submerged in the governmental issues of her country that she couldn't compose for the following two years.

She has always been outspoken about her social and political beliefs as she gave critical arguments about India's nuclear explosion in 1998, the American policy in Afghanistan and Israel's policies in west Asia. Roy is a great critic of social injustice, which is evident in the context of South Asia. Roy has always emphasized the widening gap between the powerful and the helpless in India today. In this novel she raises voices about "have-nots", the exploitation of marginalized by the capitalist system, environmental concerns and habitat degradation. She also discloses the worst side of capitalism and its subjugation in India as according to her

capitalism is root of racism, human and environmental exploitation and degradation in her book “*capitalism*”. She argues that “**we have to [...] realize that the inequality in our society has gone too far. Take for instance the refrain that India is a country of one billion people [...] the truth is that we are nation of 50 million people and the rest are not treated as people (Tickell, 2007).**”

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is a strange beast: massive, bewilderingly overpopulated with characters, frequently chronological, written in a haphazard and careless style, but capable of breathtakingly composed and powerful interludes. Every line is informed by the idea that the personal is political and vice versa, but it also questions that assumption, probing its dimensions and consequences. We discover Anjum in a graveyard, where she lives “like a tree” (part of the natural world, unspeaking, all-seeing is one interpretation; striving to avoid notice is another), but also as a “mehfil,” or “a gathering. Of everybody and nobody, of everything and nothing. Is there anybody else you would like to invite? Everyone’s invited.” Over the course of the story, Anjum’s graveyard home comes to serve as a secular, or at least multifaith, refuge, shielded from the outer world by willpower. Anjum is more commonly referred to as a “hijra,” a Hindu word that can mean hermaphrodite (Anjum, born Aftab, has both male and female sex organs until she has surgery), eunuch, third gender, or transgender person. Anjum has lived in the Khwabgah since early adolescence, which can simply mean sleeping quarters, dwelling, or palace of dreams; for her, it has been the latter, a haven of emancipation and self-expression. The other hijras who live there form a family, even those who, like Saeeda, “could speak the new language of the times – she could use the terms cis-Man and FtoM and MtoF,” edging out Anjum, one of “the old exotics,” from the “Number One slot in the media.”

Arundhati Roy has advocated for the rights of the disadvantaged and oppressed elements of society through her writings and activism, with a particular focus on current Indian society. She has boldly protested against the injustices, crimes, and discrimination that have been perpetrated against these members of society. Roy has proved herself an enormous critic as her “her eyes sharply delightful as she captures the larger India reality of subtleties of caste system, describes the “hijra” (transgender) community in delhi. (Kanjirakkat, 2017; Jobin, 2017).

Roy gives all of her characters equal voice and equal rights, regardless of their caste, race, creed, socioeconomic status, religion, area, ethnicity, and so on. In contrast to monological books, she has portrayed her characters as subjects rather than simple objects of her consciousness/ideology.

### Literature Review:

“**There’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’.**

**There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.”**

**Arundhati Roy**

The marginalised population is defined as the people that lives on the outskirts of society or in the margins. Inexplicably, this community is shut out of the mainstream and sent to the outskirts. People who fall within this category are frequently cut off from community life, with few resources and possibilities.

Their lives are filled with irritation and perplexity since the society in which they live refuses to rehabilitate them and allow them to return to normalcy. Those who are part of the mainstream, on the other hand, are immersed in a “never-stopping and constantly dazzling spectacle of the city” (According to Bauman, 89). They have better and more entertaining things to look forward to, and as Bauman points out, “The bigger and more heterogeneous a city, the more attractions it may support and offer” (89). As a result, the chasm between the centre and the fringes continues to expand. The societal system in India is on the verge of collapsing unless the situation of India’s underprivileged populations is rapidly rectified.

Arundhati Roy deftly examines the question of marginality. Using her aesthetic sensibilities, she attempts to bridge the gap between the centre and the peripheral. She fills a literary void by allowing underrepresented individuals in her narrative to express themselves democratically. Roy's literary effort of bringing or binding the broken bits of our society together is analogous to Kintsugi, a historic Japanese practise of fixing or binding broken pieces with gold dust.

Postcolonial theory is a school of thought that focuses on the political, aesthetic, economic, historical, and social consequences of European colonialism throughout the world from the 18th to the 20th centuries.

Gayatri Spivak, an Indian American postcolonial theorist and translator, reworked the term of subaltern, resulting in greater theoretical complexity. Spivak questioned the methodology of the Subaltern Studies historian in her essay "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" (1988), later declaring it inadequate and warning that self-determining consciousness of the subaltern could never be fully gained from colonial or nationalist archives. Spivak also warned that, rather than reclaiming subaltern history, they were laying the road for objectification, as older archives did not contain a single subaltern history.

Spivak coined the term "subaltern" in her seminal article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" at the same time. (1988). We must now confront the following question: On the other side of the International divisions of labour from socialised capital, inside and outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialistic law and education supplementing on earlier economic text, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' said Spivak, challenging the assumptions made by radical French theorists Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze that the voice or rights of the peasants can be clearly presented. Spivak (Spivak, 1988). She instead related the concept of subaltern to that of a gendered category, arguing:

'The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is "evidence"; rather, both were used as object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of insurgency, though the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (Spivak, 1988).'

She also claimed that patriarchy and colonialism work together to obliterate women. Spivak has continued her examination of subaltern by ruminating on concrete and intellectual definitions. Spivak emphasised how the condition of the subaltern has altered as a result of technological advancements, globalisation, and capitalism, and how this is similar to Roy's socio-political concerns. Today, according to Spivak (2000), "the subaltern must be rethought." S/he is no longer cut off from the center's lines of access.' The reason for this is because multinational firms, which are primarily American and Eurocentric, are increasingly interested in the expert environmental knowledge of rural South-Asian subalterns in order to develop "novel pharmaceuticals and proprietary crop strains." As a result, Spivak asserted that, in the name of human genetic engineering, patentholding corporations control the subaltern's knowledge and lives: 'The issue [...] is one of property — and the subaltern body as bios or subaltern knowledge as (agri-) or (herbi-) culture is its appropriative object(2016).' Roy's concern about growth and the implications of corporate ventures in recent India is very similar to this one. The book New Subaltern Politics: Reconceptualizing Hegemony and Resistance in Contemporary India is a contemporary study on subaltern studies that tries to bring a "dialectical sensibility to our understanding of subaltern politics" (Nilson, 2016).

A number of themes that are important to The Ministry of Utmost Happiness emerge from this in-depth consideration of the issue of subaltern. These are the lines;

**“How to tell a shattered story?**

**By slowly becoming everybody.**

**No.**

**By slowly becoming everything.”**

‘Everything, so much sorrow and joy and love and war and death and life, so much of being human,’ Felicell (2017) writes in his summary of this magnificent masterpiece. With its character portrayal and narrative structure, **The Ministry of Utmost Happiness** therefore both celebrates and upholds the subaltern life. Anjum, Saddam, and Tilo, among others, have made it clear that they represent the underclass.

#### **Research methodology:**

This study uses a qualitative approach and is based on a detailed and in-depth textual examination of The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. As secondary resources, other similar books such as The God of Small Things (1997) is used. This study primarily focuses on a critical examination of the novel's portrayal of "the subaltern." The current study is based on Gayatri Spivak's "can the subaltern speak" theoretical paradigm. All of the voiceless parts of Indian society featured in this work appear to be relocating from one location to another, usually from better to worse, primarily from city to graveyard. Roy expands on her story by focusing on the anthropocentric Indian civilization in which nature is viewed as "the subaltern."

#### **Analysis:**

Transgender people are classified as a third gender who are neither men nor women. For a long time, they have been subjected to social marginalisation and estrangement. These people are shunned by their families and society, and they struggle with identity issues since they are unable to define themselves within the traditional male and female parameters. They are stigmatised and compelled to live as "others" in every civilization. Due to various limits, their education and access to public space are restricted, or they opt to live a life of solitude. The term "**transgender**" refers to those who have an internal sense of gender identification. They are not the same sex as the one assigned to them at birth. It also raises questions about identity limits, stability, and coherence. Transgender people are individuals whose identities are unrelated to their biological sex, and hence deviate from the stereotypes of men and women. Their identity and behaviour do not conform to gender stereotypes. They are India's marginalised population, and as a result, they confront legal, social, and economic challenges. They don't have access to education, health care, or public spaces.

Transgender people lack a name and a social identity. Their whole existence is in jeopardy. Roy's novel tackles the basis of the gender identity crisis: transgender abuse and identity crisis. Gender identification refers to a person's identity as a male or female based on the extent of feminine or masculine qualities in an adult who corresponds to the traditional view of society. The psychological component of a person's sexual orientation is their gender identity. In **“Let Us to Live: Social Exclusion of Hijra Community”**, Sibsankar Mal has identified **Transgender** as “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 gender roles.”

Transgender people do not fit into society's expectations since they have been robbed of their social advantages. They live in a male body with female emotions. They still have an identity dilemma in this stereotyped environment, centred on the stereotypical connection between men and women. They are unable to accommodate themselves, and their families are also turned away. They are robbed of psychological, economic, and political freedom across society. When they survive in the stereotype, they want for their own name and a place to call home. The

protagonist Anjum in Arundhati Roy's work *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* depicts the condition of the transgender in Indian society. Male/female, love/hate, life/death, and so on are all binaries that these characters are torn between. They try to re-brand themselves by "naming" and "re-naming," which proves to be a courageous but ultimately fruitless effort. Such characters struggle to find their place in the complicated social and gender taxonomy that has been cultivated by the dominant class through a variety of common and controversial socio-religious discourses. The segregation of this underclass population has a complicated history. Arundhati Roy has emerged as a remarkable writer of our time, with a true, rebellious, and reformative voice. In 1997, she won the Man Booker Prize for her debut novel "God of Small Things." In contrast to other female writers, she chose the less travelled path in her writings. Her work explores society's stark realities. She never shied away from writing or speaking out about any wrongdoing. She never chooses to write fiction, fairy tales, or romance as a writer, preferring instead to interpret humanity's pain. Roy states in an interview with Kathy Arlyn Sokol: "I think that writers are always two people. I'm one person who lives my life and the other part of me watches me live my life, you know, and that part is the writer who is sort of detached from everything and watches. It doesn't make you live your own life less passionately, but there's a part of you that is sitting on the ceiling fan and watching it and smiling or whatever. In everything I do or have ever done in my life, I feel anger towards authority, and I'm even frightened of ever having a child because I don't want authority over that small person. It's very confusing for me and anyone who is involved with me. Because it's just this permanent questioning of every little thing, every sentence. I mean, it becomes a wall which is quite tiring sometimes. I suppose often these emotions are awakened in you through whatever you have been through in your childhood and nothing that happens to you as an adult ever quells those questions or those fears or that anger. It will always be there. And yet, I know, that if you were to speak to anybody who knows me, they will say, 'Oh, she's so calm.' And the fact is that I am very calm, but that is only in my day-to-day interaction, but I am not at all calm about major issues or major questions, you know. And that's not a sort of shouting kind of anger that I have, but a very cold anger."

The novel's major character is a Hijra, who are the most disadvantaged group in society, notably in South Asia, in terms of rights. Spivak contended in works like "The Rani of Sirmur" that colonialism and patriarchy work together to erase women as second-class citizens. In the case of transgender people, social political deprivation, patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, and even their own bodies all work together to erase them as second-class citizens. Nimmo, a transgender residing at Khawabgah told Anjum "Do you know why god made Hijras?" she asked Aftab one afternoon. „it was an experiment. He decided to create something, a living creature that is incapable of happiness. So he made us....for us the price rise and school admissions, husband's beatings, wives' cheatings, Hindu-Muslim riots, Indo-Pak war [...] all *inside* us. The riot is inside us. [...] The war is *inside* us. Indo-Pak is *inside* us. It will never settle down (23)." Transgender, as subalterns, have no history, according to Spivak, yet they have always existed in society. Every Hijra in Khawabgah begins to experience identity crisis and struggles for their position in history, as evidenced by their visit to "The Sound and Light Show" at "The Red Fort." Though Ustad Kulsoom Bi appeared to be content with a single sound in "The Sound and Light show" that showed their presence in Emperor's reign. 'So we're known as the forgotten ones?' Kulsoom Bi questioned, quickly evoking the question. When Gudiye tried to demonstrate that Hijras had a special position in "Hindu Mythology," he said, "Only Hijras faithfully waited for him (Ram) at the edge of the forest for the entire fourteen years" (51).

Because it is nearly unknown in history, the little realm of Khawabgah is not connected to Spivak's hegemonic Eurocentric line of cultural and economic dominance. Saeeda, who 'could

speak the language of the times - she could use the terms cisMan and FtoM and MtoF', is a clear illustration of such a condition (38). Sayeeda's "western clothes" and the impact of the 9/11 attack on the American Trade Center on the lives of Anjum and her fellow Hijras clearly demonstrate that no one is outside the reach of such an American and Eurocentric capitalist world, including the subalterns. Though Hijras are denied their identity, they are not immune to the global chain's effect. Although Anjum is lavishly depicted in the first three chapters of the novel, Sehgal (2017, 37) argues that The Ministry of Utmost Happiness only provides a "tiny" representation of transgender people's lives, problems, and successes. Sehgal (2017) criticized Anjou's character as clichéd because of her "patched together body" and "partially realises dreams" in "Arundhati Roy's Fascinating Mess." Anjum, in Sega's opinion, fails to achieve her purpose. Prior to this novel, no other work of literature has ever represented a transgender protagonist's existence, as well as the battle, in such vivid and detailed detail. The novel's most essential place is undoubtedly Jannat Guest House. This graveyard has served as a "secular, sanctuary, protected by willpower from the turbulent outside world" for Anjum, as well as a "secular, sanctuary, protected by willpower from the turbulent outside world" (Clark, 2018). Roy wanted to provide structure to her rich fantasy of democracy by making Jannat Guest House a prominent setting. Roy generously attempts to reframe democracy by turning the **graveyard into a'mehfil,' a gathering of everyone and nobody, everything and nothing. [...] Everyone is invited.'** Despite the fact that Anjum founded and owns Jannat Guest House, it has become a "hub for Hijras [...] who had fallen out of, or been expelled from, the closely regulated grid of Hijra Gharanas (68)."

As a result, subaltern Anjum and other marginalised people united in Jannat Guest House to form a new identity based on freedom and liberation. According to Lertlaksanaporn (2020), Deleuze and Guttari's concept of rhizome can be identified in this context because they came to Jannat Guest House and left through the line of flight or Deterritorialization, cutting across the normative line of heteronormative society and the hierarchical system of the Khwabgh. Spivak counters this viewpoint by saying that Gilles Deleuze ignores "the epistemic brutality of imperialism" (1988, 289). According to Spivak, the subaltern cannot express their genuine self inside a Western framework.

'The goal of writing or speaking for the subaltern is the process of becoming through the development of new connections, not to present or subjugate the subaltern into the western framework.' In the wide area where the voice of the subaltern can be heard, the writer or speaker will become Other or insignificant.' As a result, Jannat Guest House can be described as a utopia that turned out to be a paradise for these peasants.

### Conclusion:

To summarise, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness depicts the subaltern's dreadful living conditions. The goal of this research is to examine how marginalised individuals are represented in the South Asian environment. It is also sought in this study to retrace the evolution of the term "subaltern," as well as how subalterns are faring in today's modern and globalised society. The state of the "subaltern" has not changed greatly, as seen by the representation of the "subaltern." They were victims of colonisation during the colonial period, and they are today victims of a subtle and long-lasting social cycle of dominance shaped by socialised capitalism.

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