

PSYCHOLOGICAL MARGINALIZATION AND TRANSGENDER SUBJECTIVITY IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

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Abstract

*This research investigates the psychological struggles faced by transgender individuals as depicted in Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. At the heart of the story is Anjum, a transgender woman whose life journey unveils the emotional turmoil and psychological battles resulting from systemic oppression, societal alienation, and identity challenges. The study focuses on the mental health impact of trauma, marginalization, and gender dysphoria on Anjum, linking her literary representation to the lived experiences of transgender communities. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's "trauma theory," the analysis explores how encounters with violence and exclusion lead to conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Tajfel and Turner's "social identity theory" is employed to delve into the consequences of exclusion on Anjum's self-esteem and mental state, while Judith Butler's "gender performativity" framework examines how Anjum navigates her gender identity within restrictive societal norms. Furthermore, the study highlights coping mechanisms adopted by transgender individuals, such as embracing self-acceptance, building support networks, and fostering resilience. By combining psychological insights with literary analysis, this research underscores the importance of inclusive narratives in literature to shed light on gender and identity, foster empathy, challenge societal prejudices, and advocate for the mental well-being of transgender individuals.*

Keywords: *Psychological marginalization, Trauma, Identity Crisis, Gender Performativity, Social Alienation*

3 Introduction

Transgender individuals face numerous psychological challenges due to societal stigmatization, limited acceptance, and systemic discrimination. Arundhati Roy's novel **The Ministry of Utmost Happiness** offers a powerful portrayal of these struggles through the character of Anjum, a transgender woman confronting the complexities of identity, belonging, and survival. This study aims to explore the psychological difficulties faced by Anjum and other transgender characters in the novel, focusing on themes such as identity development, trauma, social exclusion, and resilience. In society, transgender individuals often remain among the most marginalized, restricted in almost every sphere of life. Although Roy presents Anjum as the protagonist, the novel examines her psychological struggles in depth. Through this work, readers can gain insight into who transgender individuals truly are, their perceptions, and what measures might help society better understand and accept them, particularly from a post-colonial perspective.

The term "transgender" emerged in the 1980s and gained its modern meaning in 1992 through Leslie Feinberg's pamphlet "Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come". Virginia Prince, an advocate for gender expression in Southern California, used the term to describe people like herself, whose identities she saw as existing along a spectrum between "transvestite"—a term introduced by Dr. Harry Benjamin in the 1950s—and other gender identities. Historically, transgender individuals have rarely been acknowledged as a distinct gender; instead, they were perceived as occupying a space in between.

Arundhati Roy captures this complexity in her novel, vividly illustrating the multifaceted challenges faced by transgender individuals from social, political, and economic perspectives. Her work amplifies the voices of the LGBTQ community in modern India. Despite transgender individuals' self-perception regarding their physical and social roles, society often disregards their fundamental needs for love and acceptance. Transgender people frequently struggle with affirming their gender identities and navigating the physical and social transformations that come with it.

The experiences of loss and suffering among transgender individuals are uniquely profound, distinct from those of others. Roy's narrative delves into crucial aspects of transgender identity, highlighting their physical, emotional, and psychological fractures, as well as their methods of coping with resulting trauma.

"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" (2017) is Arundhati Roy's second novel, following her Booker Prize-winning masterpiece "The God of Small Things" (1997). Known for her non-fiction works addressing pressing social, literary, and political issues, Roy critiques systemic oppression and the marginalization of disenfranchised communities. She addresses not only regional and national concerns but also global issues in her writing.

In this novel, Roy brings attention to the struggles of the transgender community alongside other pressing societal challenges. In India, transgender individuals, often referred to as "Hijra," endure isolation and deprivation, living lives marked by marginalization. As Sharma (2018) noted, "The transgender community is one of the most deprived and disempowered groups in Indian society, treated as less than human and forced to lead isolated lives." Roy's fiction sheds light on these issues through her central character, Anjum. The story begins and ends with her, weaving together various narratives to illuminate the world's injustices. Anjum connects the different threads of the story, directly or indirectly influencing every aspect of the multilayered plot.

Transgender individuals endure immense grief and suffering, both internal and external, psychological and physical. They exist outside of the conventional "Duniya" yet bear witness to the injustices and suffering of others. Through courage and acceptance, they strive to ease their burdens and pursue happiness. In Roy's fictional world, the personal and national narratives intertwine, giving the transgender community a voice and showcasing the author's unwavering support. This support is poignantly illustrated in her realistic depiction of Delhi, symbolized by a "puddle of pee." The story concludes with Miss Udaya Jebeen, tying together the narrative's themes.

Psychological analysis examines the workings of the human mind and their impact on cognition, behavior, and emotions. Psychological agony refers to the intense mental distress and emotional suffering individuals experience due to various psychological challenges. This term encompasses emotional pain, inner turmoil, and profound discomfort, all of which can adversely affect mental health and overall well-being. These struggles may include trauma, anxiety, and other forms of psychological anguish. In this analysis, we will explore the psychological struggles transgender individuals face in response to societal stereotypes and discrimination.

3.1 Research objectives

- To analyze the psychological struggles of transgender individuals as depicted in '*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*'.
- To explore the impact of social rejection, discrimination, and violence on transgender mental health.
- To understand the coping mechanisms employed by transgender individuals in the novel.

- To connect the psychological problems of transgender individuals in literature to real-life experiences.

1.2 Research Questions

- How does Arundhati Roy portray the psychological struggles of transgender individuals in *'The Ministry of Utmost Happiness'*?
- What are the major mental health issues faced by Anjum and other transgender characters in the novel?
- How does societal rejection and discrimination contribute to the psychological distress of transgender individuals?
- What coping mechanisms do transgender individuals adopt to deal with psychological struggles?

1.3 Problem Statement

Transgender individuals endure profound psychological struggles rooted in societal rejection, systemic discrimination, and challenges related to identity. Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" delves into these complex realities through the character of Anjum, a transgender woman grappling with trauma, social alienation, and a persistent quest for acceptance and belonging. This study intends to explore the psychological hardships experienced by transgender individuals in the novel, such as gender dysphoria, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and exclusion from mainstream society. Through the lens of Trauma Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Gender Performativity Theory, the research aims to shed light on the psychological toll of institutionalized oppression while fostering greater empathy and inclusivity toward the transgender community.

1.4 Significance of Research

This research holds great significance as it delves into the psychological struggles encountered by transgender individuals through the literary portrayal in Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness". By examining themes such as identity crises, trauma, social alienation, and resilience, the study highlights the mental health challenges experienced by transgender individuals. It underscores the detrimental effects of systemic discrimination, exclusion, and violence on their psychological well-being.

Contributing to both literary and psychological discourse, this study provides valuable insights into the intersection of gender identity and mental health. By employing frameworks such as Trauma Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Gender Performativity Theory, it deepens our understanding of how transgender individuals cope with social rejection, emotional distress, and the journey toward self-acceptance.

This work is particularly relevant for academics, psychologists, gender studies experts, and human rights advocates, as it raises awareness of the lived experiences of transgender individuals and emphasizes the need for mental health support and social inclusivity. Furthermore, it sheds light on the critical role of literature in fostering empathy, challenging stereotypes, and driving policy changes to uphold the rights and dignity of transgender individuals.

2. Literature Review

Transgender individuals face distinct psychological challenges, often stemming from societal discrimination, struggles with identity, and systemic marginalization. Extensive research highlights the mental health implications of gender nonconformity, connecting it to elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" offers a profound literary exploration of these issues through the character of Anjum—a transgender woman who endures rejection, trauma, and demonstrates remarkable resilience. This novel serves as an essential lens for examining the

mental health struggles of transgender individuals, as well as the far-reaching consequences of their marginalization.

Studies in psychology reveal a strong connection between gender dysphoria and mental distress. Bockting et al. (2013) assert that societal rejection frequently triggers profound identity crises among transgender individuals, leading to emotional pain and internalized stigma. In “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness”, this is evident in Anjum’s continuous battle with identity within a rigidly gendered world. Meyer’s (2003) Minority Stress Model further explains how systemic prejudice, social exclusion, and acts of violence exacerbate mental health conditions in transgender people. Roy captures this in her portrayal of Anjum’s struggles, vividly demonstrating the damaging effects of marginalization and prejudice on mental well-being.

A recurring theme in transgender studies is trauma. Transgender individuals often encounter violence and discrimination, resulting in lasting psychological harm. Caruth’s Trauma Theory (1996) argues that exposure to repeated traumatic events can lead to deep-seated emotional distress. In the novel, Anjum’s expulsion from her family, her encounters with communal violence, and her tireless quest for social acceptance reflect the harsh realities faced by many transgender individuals. Research by Testa et al. (2015) confirms that transgender people often have elevated rates of PTSD due to societal and familial rejection, paralleling Anjum’s traumatic experiences and her journey to find safety. Such trauma frequently manifests as chronic stress, emotional instability, or, in severe cases, suicidal thoughts.

Social identity plays a pivotal role in shaping both an individual’s self-concept and their psychological health. Tajfel & Turner’s Social Identity Theory (1979) posits that individuals derive self-esteem and belonging from their association with social groups. In Roy’s narrative, Anjum finds a sense of solace and identity within the hijra community, which becomes a crucial support system for her. Studies by Nuttbrock et al. (2010) affirm that strong communal ties can greatly reduce feelings of isolation and improve the mental health of transgender individuals. Judith Butler’s Gender Performativity Theory (1990) challenges the notion of gender as biologically determined, framing it instead as a socially constructed identity shaped by repeated acts and behaviors. Through Anjum’s story, Roy questions and subverts traditional gender binaries, reinforcing contemporary discussions about gender fluidity. Her work transcends a simple narrative about psychological struggles, serving as a call for greater inclusivity and awareness of transgender mental health issues.

Critic Batra (2017) provided an in-depth analysis of Roy’s novel. He observed the narrative’s unique structure, describing it as a blend of multiple storylines—one focusing on the “Hijra” community and the marginalized, another addressing terrorism in Kashmir, and a third, more peripheral narrative involving a Naxalite woman. These threads are loosely tied together towards the conclusion of the novel. In his words:

“It is not one novel, rather it is a mix of two novels; one dealing with the hijra community and the depressed class, and the second with the issue of terrorism in Kashmir. Even the third short narrative focusing on a woman Naxalite is sought to be linked loosely towards the end” (p. 431)

Indian American author and critic Garth Risk Hallberg praised “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness” in a New York Times review published in June 2017. Hallberg commended Roy’s vivid use of language and her meticulous detailing of Old Delhi’s Muslim cultural landscape. He emphasized that her true strength lies in exploring fractured lives and identities, notably through Anjum’s narrative. By amplifying the voices of the marginalized, Roy presents Anjum’s internal torment with profound psychological insight.

Trace Peterson's 2015 poem "After Before and After" provides a parallel artistic perspective, exploring themes of self-discovery, freedom, and divergence from rigid gender norms. Peterson, a transgender poet, critiques societal expectations that deprive individuals of authenticity and joy. This mirrors the themes in Roy's novel, where transgender individuals contend with the stresses of belonging to a gender minority.

In India, transgender individuals, often referred to as "Hijras," endure isolation and deprivation as an inherent aspect of their societal positioning. As Sharma (2018) noted, "The transgender community is one of the most deprived and disempowered groups in Indian society, treated as less than human and left to lead isolated lives."

Arundhati Roy's novel acts as a compelling work of fiction that examines these issues through multiple critical perspectives, shining a much-needed light on the lives of the marginalized.

3. Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodology to explore the psychological struggles faced by transgender individuals as portrayed in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Through a detailed textual analysis, the study utilizes psychoanalytical and socio-cultural approaches to examine how the novel addresses issues such as mental health challenges, identity crises, trauma, and the societal marginalization of transgender individuals. Additionally, it delves into the use of narrative techniques, character interactions, and symbolic elements that contribute to the representation of transgender identity. The research also sheds light on the broader implications of systemic oppression and resilience, highlighting how literature mirrors the real-world challenges faced by marginalized communities. By integrating theoretical frameworks with literary analysis, this study offers a comprehensive perspective on the intersection of literature, gender identity, and psychology.

The primary source for this investigation is Arundhati Roy's novel, while secondary sources include academic articles, books, and studies related to transgender mental health, trauma theory, and gender identity. The research emphasizes textual analysis, focusing on close readings of the novel to uncover themes related to psychological distress, social alienation, and coping mechanisms. By tracing Anjum's experiences, the study illustrates the profound psychological challenges faced by transgender individuals, particularly in the face of systemic prejudice and cultural norms. It further explores the roles of self-acceptance, resilience, and communal support in mitigating emotional distress, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of transgender mental health issues in both literary and societal contexts.

This research is grounded in Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory, which examines the long-term psychological impact of violence and discrimination. Caruth's framework highlights how trauma can result in conditions like PTSD, depression, and emotional fragmentation, as reflected in Anjum's narrative. The novel underscores how past traumas profoundly shape identity, emphasizing that trauma is a collective societal issue rather than merely an individual experience.

Tajfel & Turner's Social Identity Theory also plays a key role in analyzing the impact of social rejection and communal belonging on mental health. Anjum's rejection by her biological family and eventual acceptance within the hijra community reveal how a sense of belonging influences self-perception and emotional well-being. The narrative emphasizes the importance of community in fostering resilience among transgender individuals.

Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory provides a lens for interpreting the novel's exploration of gender fluidity. Butler's theory challenges traditional notions of gender as biologically determined and instead frames it as a construct shaped by repeated social behaviors. Roy's portrayal of Anjum actively questions binary gender norms, enriching contemporary discourse on gender identity and inclusivity.

By combining literary and psychological insights, this study deepens our understanding of the mental health challenges faced by transgender individuals and the societal structures that influence their experiences. It highlights how fictional works like Roy's novel can foster empathy, challenge stereotypes, and promote discussions on social equity and mental health.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This research utilizes a psychoanalytical and socio-cultural theoretical framework to explore the psychological challenges faced by transgender individuals as depicted in Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness." The analysis is anchored in three prominent theories: Trauma Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Gender Performativity Theory, which collectively provide a holistic perspective on the psychological and social struggles of transgender individuals within the novel.

Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory (1996) serves as a pivotal foundation for understanding the enduring psychological impact of trauma on transgender individuals. This theory posits that repeated encounters with violence, exclusion, and systemic discrimination can result in conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and identity disintegration. In the novel, Anjum's personal journey—ranging from being abandoned by her family to experiencing communal violence and striving for social recognition—illustrates the profound psychological toll of these adversities. Trauma Theory is instrumental in interpreting how Anjum's past experiences continue to influence her emotional and mental state throughout the narrative.

Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979) sheds light on how societal rejection and discrimination shape the self-perception and mental health of transgender individuals. According to the theory, an individual's identity is inherently tied to their membership in and acceptance by social groups. Anjum's progression from familial rejection to finding a sense of belonging within the *hijra* community exemplifies the critical role of supportive social networks in alleviating psychological distress. This theory highlights the significance of community acceptance in mitigating feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression among transgender individuals.

Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory (1990) provides a framework for critiquing the rigid gender binaries portrayed in the novel. Butler argues that gender is a societal construct, performed through repetitive behaviors rather than being biologically fixed. Anjum's narrative challenges traditional gender norms, illustrating the fluidity of gender identity and the psychological challenges that arise when societal expectations conflict with personal authenticity. The theory emphasizes the importance of self-acceptance and resilience in fostering transgender mental well-being.

By synthesizing these three theoretical perspectives, the research offers a comprehensive understanding of the psychological struggles faced by transgender individuals. It provides an in-depth examination of trauma, identity development, societal rejection, and resilience, contributing valuable insights into the intersection of gender identity, mental health, and social structures. Additionally, this study will incorporate post-colonial theory to analyze how colonial perspectives may have historically influenced societal views on transgender identities, further enriching the analysis.

4. Data Analysis

This study uses textual analysis to explore the psychological challenges experienced by transgender individuals in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The analysis focuses on key themes such as identity crisis, trauma, social rejection, and resilience. It incorporates theoretical frameworks including Trauma Theory, Social Identity Theory, and

Gender Performativity Theory to better understand the psychological impact of marginalization on transgender individuals.

The novel centers on Anjum's struggle with her identity, reflecting the psychological toll imposed by societal rejection and rigid gender norms. Her transition from Aftab to Anjum highlights her battle with self-doubt, alienation, and internalized stigma—experiences that align with research on gender dysphoria and its mental health consequences.

From the outset, the novel immerses readers in the somber emotions Anjum endures. Her choice to live in a graveyard is particularly striking, symbolizing her alienation. The narrative comments on this decision: "She lived in a graveyard like a tree." (Roy, p.9)

The severity of her suffering is evident as the novel delves into the torment Anjum faced, which drove her to seek solace among the dead. Mocked by society, she is called names such as "Clown without a circus, queen without a palace."(Arundhati Roy, p.9)

Her deep identity confusion is summed up in her own words: "I'm all of them, I'm Romi and Juli, I'm Laila and Majnu... I'm not Anjum, I'm Anjuman. I'm a gathering. Of everybody and nobody, of everything and nothing."(Roy, p.9,10) This portrayal underscores the psychological impact of societal rejection on transgender identity.

The rejection faced by transgender individuals is mirrored in the reactions of others. For example, even Imam Ziauddin struggles to comprehend Anjum's identity, questioning her about burial rites and rituals. Her transition to the "Khawbgha"—a sanctuary for people like her—represents her attempt to redefine her sense of self. "Tell me, you people, when you die, where do they burry you? Who bathes the body?" (Roy, p.10) Yet, the societal perception of transgender individuals as outcasts persists. Anjum's decision to establish the "Jannat Guest House" symbolizes her ongoing quest for identity and belonging. This Guest House includes the graves of her relatives including Ahlem Bai who helped her to come in to this world.

The societal stigma associated with transgender individuals is poignantly depicted in Aftab's mother's anguish at his birth. Roy writes, "Her first reaction was to feel her heart constrict and her bones turn to ash... Her fourth reaction was to contemplate killing herself and her child."(Roy, p.12). The mother's despair and the secrecy surrounding Aftab's gender, concealed even from his father for six years, illustrate the profound fear of societal judgment. "Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman. Everything except her baby".(Roy, p.13)

During Aftab's childhood, his singing talent initially drew praise, but as others recognized his gender nonconformity, mockery soon followed. Children teased him, saying, "He's not a He or a She. He's a He-She"(Roy, p.15). These taunts deeply affected Aftab, sometimes this teasing becomes "unbearable" for him.

When Aftab saw a tall slim-hipped woman, wearing bright lipstick, gold high heels and a shiny and a green shiny shalwar kameez .Aftab followed her "He wanted to be her"(Roy, p.19). He, inspired by a glamorous transgender woman he saw on the street, decided to join the "Khawbgha". This marked his full embrace of his transgender identity as Anjum, despite the societal repercussions.

Aftab wanted to be look like Bombay Silk and the seven others lived under the supervision of Kulsoom Bi. But regardless of what admonition and punishment awaited him, Aftab stubbornly took the decision to move to the Khawbgha "house of dreams" for him. At this point we can say that his Id dominates when he decides to move to khawbgha as Anjum by rejecting the egoistical idea of being living as Aftab.

"The Khawbgha was called Khawbgha, Ustad kalsoom Bi said, because it was where special people, a blessed people came with their dreams that could not be realized in the Duniya."

Arundhati Roy explains transgender's trauma by their conversation when Nimmo (another transgender at khawbgha) "D' you know why God made Hijras". Aftab said: `No, Why?

Nimmo answered: “He made an experiment. He decided to create something, a living creature that is incapable of happiness. So He made us”(Roy, p.22). She pointed out the wretchedness they feel by saying that they are not away from the riots and the resulting distress other people: “The riot is inside us. The war is inside us. Indo-Pak is inside us. It will never settle down”(Roy, p. 23). She meant to say that their suffering will not come to an end. They are just “kidnappers”, “khushikhor” part of “obscenity” for ‘Duniya’.

Arundhati Roy also depicts the inner struggles of transgender individuals, such as their yearning for love and companionship. On her eighteenth birthday, Anjum experiences an unfulfilled desire for intimacy, which triggers anguish and self-inflicted pain. She wore a red disco sari, with a backless choli. “That night she felt dreamed she was a new bride on her wedding night. She awoke distressed to find that her sexual pleasure had expressed itself into her beautiful new garment like a man`s”(Roy, p.25). This aligns with Freudian concepts of libido, reflecting the natural human need for love and acceptance, which is cruelly denied to transgender individuals by societal norms.

The novel examines Anjum’s experience of trauma through events such as her rejection by her family and the horrors of the Gujarat riots. These events leave her profoundly shaken, culminating in PTSD and emotional withdrawal. Anjum’s decision to live in isolation in the graveyard signifies her inability to reconcile with the harsh realities of the “Duniya.” Even her foster daughter, Zainab, notices her distress, remarking, “Mummy’s never happy.” Despite her struggles, Anjum channels her pain into creating a haven for the marginalized in the form of the Jannat Guest House—a space where the living and the dead coexist.

Roy also portrays the spiritual and cultural dimensions of transgender lives, exploring rituals such as the religious castration ceremony among Hindu transgender individuals. However, Muslim characters like Bombay Silk and Heera face theological dilemmas about altering their bodies, which highlights the intersection of religion and transgender identity.

The novel reflects on the historical rejection of transgender individuals, suggesting that their current marginalization is rooted in colonial-era attitudes. Ustad Kulsoom Bi recalls a time when transgender individuals were esteemed members of royal courts: “That is us. That is our ancestry, our history. We were never commoner, you see we were the members of the staff of the Royal palace” (Roy, p.42)

Finally, the study highlights the role of social identity in Anjum’s search for acceptance. The “hijra” community provides her with a sense of belonging, demonstrating the importance of social support in mitigating isolation and emotional distress. By exploring coping mechanisms and resilience, Roy’s narrative becomes a powerful testament to the strength and perseverance of transgender individuals in the face of systemic oppression.

5. Conclusion

The psychological challenges faced by transgender individuals remain a pressing issue, largely driven by societal rejection, discrimination, and trauma. Arundhati Roy’s **The Ministry of Utmost Happiness** serves as a poignant exploration of these struggles through the character of Anjum. The novel sheds light on how factors such as identity crises, trauma, and social exclusion contribute to mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among transgender individuals. By examining Anjum’s experiences, this research highlights the emotional and psychological toll that systemic oppression imposes on transgender lives.

Through the lens of Trauma Theory, the study demonstrates how repeated experiences of violence and marginalization result in enduring psychological distress. Social Identity Theory underscores the critical role of community support in alleviating emotional suffering, as illustrated by Anjum’s eventual integration into the “hijra” community, which offers her a sense

of belonging. Additionally, Gender Performativity Theory challenges traditional, binary notions of gender, emphasizing the fluidity of identity and the importance of societal acceptance in fostering psychological well-being.

This research concludes that addressing the psychological struggles of transgender individuals necessitates increased social inclusion, access to mental health resources, and comprehensive legal protections. Literary works like “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness” play a vital role in raising awareness, dismantling stereotypes, and advocating for greater gender inclusivity. By addressing these critical issues within both literature and society, we can take significant steps toward fostering acceptance and improving mental health outcomes for transgender individuals.

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