

Unheard Story of Small Things in Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

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Abstract. With *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) Arundhati Roy returns to fiction after twenty years of non-fiction and political journalism. With her long-awaited second novel, Roy also leaves behind the ambiguous status of the single-novel author. Her works certainly reflect bitter reality of society. She does not hesitate either to write or speak on any anti-social issue. Fantasy, fairy tale or romance are hardly found in her work rather she prefers to decipher the suffering of mankind. She highlights mostly the underprivileged and deprived section of the society-hijras, political rebels, the deserted baby girls, women who will not know their place in the main stream of the society, the poor, the present article aims to look at Unheard Story of Small Things in her present novel set within the narrative of Roy's experience with India's others.

Keywords : Transgender; dystopia; multicultural society; discrimination.

The long-awaited second novel from Arundhati Roy has finally appeared after two decades, under the title *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* for what readers were eagerly waiting for. After the publication of *The God of Small Things* the Booker prize winning novelist turned into an activist. That was probably responsible for her departure into non-fiction and the publication of books opposing armament, industrialization, globalization, etc. She has openly opposed the nuclear explosion carried out by India in 1998, the American policy in Afghanistan and Israel's policies in West Asia, but her two books, viz., *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom* (2011) and *The Hanging of Afzal Guru*, and the Strange Case of Attack on the Indian Parliament (2013) reflect her political views on the sensitive issue of *Kashmir*. The novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a political novel from every aspect, as it refers to political grandees for the sake of highlighting the issues of the most deprived section of the society. As compared to her last and the only other novel *The God of Small Things* (1992), the literary traits, by no means inconsequential, take secondary place in relation to the writer's political philosophy voiced in this novel. She has adopted several strategies to accomplish the agenda; these are being selective in the choice of material, put in negatives with emotional capital through deft use of language, and creating an insider-character to support the opponent's viewpoint. All these make the novel a dystrophic one which refuses to note any positivity around or any ray of light at the end of the tunnel.

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, engraved the setting, gave life to the character and soul to the story. The story highlights about gender discrimination, religious differences and the political domination that always encouraged assassinations of innocent people. Instead of sympathy to the victims, they are

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named as accused and they are murdered in the name of law. This massive and sprawling tale has two main folds — one follows Anjum, a hijra, unrolling threadbare Persian carpet in a city graveyard but she calls it home. She and her company harbour a hope that has no entity but only to resurrect the breath lost by years ago. The other follows Tilo, a thorny and irresistible architect turned activist (who seems to be modeled on Roy herself), and the three men who fall in love with Tilo.

The main character of the novel Anjum has been compared with the tree. Roy used the metaphor of a tree to tell the life of Anjum. She writes :

She lived in the graveyard like a tree. At dawn she saw the crows off and welcomed the bats home. At dusk she did the opposite. Between shifts she conferred with the ghosts of vultures that loomed in her high branches. She felt gentle grip of their talons like an ache in an amputated limb. She gathered they weren't altogether unhappy at having excused themselves and exited from the story. (*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 3)

The tree could mean a natural growth. It could also signify her will to live against all odds, shuttling between the poles. She resists the vultures that loomed in the high branches of the tree. The vulture being eliminated through poison acts as a metaphor, the way Indian society is poisoned by history of corrupt politicians, religious hatreds, and shedding blood, death and denied justice to innocent people. When we move forward we find that she is called by different names —Magnu, Romeo, Anjum. A history is imposed on her, through different names, but she is least bothered about it :

It doesn't matter. I'm all of them, I'm Romi and Juli, I'm Laila and Majnu. And Mujna, why not? Who says my name is Anjum, I'm Anjuman. I'm a mehfil, I'm a gathering. Of everybody and nobody, of everything and nothing. (4)

As we discover Anjum really becomes a mehfil for all. Her Jannat Guest House acted as an abode for multi-faith and multi-caste people. In second chapter, we find Anjum in Khwabgah, the resort exclusively belonging to the transgender as their comfortable and safe-zone. Throughout the first four chapters, the readers are introduced to one of the subject-matters of the novel — the domain of the *hijra*-the transgender or third gender people.

In India the community still is fighting to avail their civil rights. Society treated them very indifferently and they are ambiguous about their future. They beg for their survivable. In the text Roy has captured the transformation, the plight, the struggle of Anjum which symbolically presents for every transgender living in

a democratic country like ours. Society has failed to provide equal rights to the community and they are treated as shame and nothing worth for main stream community.

Roy has portrayed the dark side of multicultural society living in our country. There are people of different race, caste, creed, religion and faith living in India. Sometimes, different faiths lost their balance and always ending up in violence but without any achievement in general. The most often clash is between the Muslims and The Hindus. Roy also talked about the plight of Kashmir Pandits after several hundred Hindus had been massacred. Government failed to protect them so they left the valley and started living in the plains. Many of them became homeless and faced endless troubles as a refugee in their own land. Muslim boys are also arrested in the suspicion of making a terrorist attack. Anjum survived because the attackers thought that killing Hijra was a sin. Each Muslim was a convict in the eyes of the Hindus. So this hatred turns into mass killing whenever they find any issue. In the name of killing cows, innocents are killed as cows are believed to be a holy creature in Hinduism :

You had better chased out these old cows that you have here, she said.' If they die here- not if, when they die – they will say you killed them and that will be the end of all of you. They must have their eyes on this property now. That's how they do it these days. They accuse you of eating beef and then take over your house and your land and send you to refugee camp. It's all about property, not cows. You have to be very careful. (402)

Roy projected the contemporary critical and sensitive socio-political issues of India. Under the covers of secularism and democracy how intolerance, racism, discrimination and injustice were frequently practised. How people are slaughtered and innocents are buried in the dark. The text is an uttered truth. She projected a transgender as a protagonist. By doing that she has given chances to the readers to have glimpse over such life, a life considered as a curse. But Anjum was never ashamed of her. She became what she wanted to and was never afraid of taking a step ahead. She was capable of building for herself 'Jannat', a heaven. She also adopted a girl child, named her Zainab and started to have a family.

Besides, presenting a story through the perspective of a neglected and unaccepted transgender, she also exposed the inhuman treatment to the Dalits. These Dalits never got a chance to develop themselves of lack of awareness and knowledge, thus they became the victims of injustice :

In 2008 the situations was much worst inside the forest. Operation Green Hunt is announced by Government. War against people. Thousands of

police and paramilitary are in the forest. Killing adivasis, burning villages. No adivasi can stay in her house or their village. They sleep in the forest outside at night because at night police come, hundred, two hundred, sometimes five hundred police. They take everything, burn everything, steal everything. Chickens, goats, money. They want adivasi people to vacate forest so they can make a steel township and mining. (421)

She described the situation of such underprivileged Dalits, who are forced to leave their own native place and were deprived from their civil rights. Roy presented the lives of the naxals in the forest. They didn't choose to do a hunger strike and request the government for their rights. They chose to lift their arms with guns to snatch their privileges as citizens of democratic country like India. In the letter of Jebeen's real mother, a maoist explains every incident. She left her child because she cannot take care of her. She was raped by policeman on duty which resulted into the birth of this child. As she has to live in forest, she gave up the child for her future. This was the reality which was never heard or seen. Poor women had to shut their mouth as it is believed that it's easy to suppress a woman. The scream of women is always unheard. They are taught to bear all the pain silently just because they live in a society where all laws are made to control the life of women in the name of culture and tradition.

The second strand of the story deals with S. Tilottama simply referred to as Tilo, a nonconformist architect with a personality like smoke: quiet, diffuse, bewitching. Her romance with a Kashmiri insurgent, she became an observer of, and even a participant in, the conflict time. Her strident unconventionality is writ all over her. Her dark complexion, laconic nature, alert presence and every breath she takes are burdened with layers of meaning. She is courted by three men, Biplop Dasgupta, Nagraj Hariharan and Musa Yeswi. It is through Tilo's narration that Roy paints a picture of dystopian Kashmir ravaged by human right abuses. There is no ministry of utmost happiness in troubled Kashmir except the ministry of innocent executions by the corrupt and venal politicians.

Roy's rich and knowing narration wings across the landscape, traversing caste, religion and gender divides. She acerbically captures the cruel ironies of city like Delhi where dead pampers lie in "air conditioned splendour." It is a story about our contemporary world delivered through the microcosm of individuals living through the never ending and harrowing conflict in Kashmir and the marginal communities of outsiders in Delhi. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* demands a certain degree of attention and reflection in equal parts. The dedicated readers will certainly come away with a rewarded sense of empathy for humanity, despite its short comings. *The Ministry of Utmost happiness* is not a sole apprenticeship of

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imagination rather, it is a joint feat of both imagination and reality. Everyone who has a sophisticated taste for literature and is enthusiastic about Indian political and religious history should read it at least once since it offers a pleasant reading with the features of fiction as opposed to the tedious prosaic nature of textbooks on politics of India.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is a complete satire aiming to attack the ways of patriarchal society where a transgender begs for his place, women are raped and bound to seize their lips, abandoned lives of dalits and Hindus and Muslims fight. The blind government taking all the political advantages from those events. The actual victims are the citizens. Roy always captures real events in her texts and this so-called fiction is no exception. The story takes us through the lanes between the graveyards to Valley, forest to protest field, and silent tears to demonstration.

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Work Cited

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