

A Study On The Work Of Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness"

Ms. Neha Rana,
Assistant Professor,
Deptt. Of English
Rajdhani College, Delhi

Abstract

Arundhati Roy can be termed as the most refined writer of this decade. She got international fame for her debut novel 'The God of small things.' Her works embodies realism, political and social crisis and empathy for humanity. This paper attempts to understand her mind as a writer and explores the multidimensional and multi layered story of The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. The fiction holds the unbearable truths of society such as wretched condition of minorities, humiliated life of trans genders, mediocre government, life of naxals, rape, murder and more over the story is about the marginalized group of people who are victim of injustice , inequality and prejudice.

Keywords: Queer text, Politics, Satire, Historical Realism

Introduction

Arundhati Roy emerged as an extraordinary writer of this present era possessing genuine, rebellious, reformative voice. She received Man of Booker prize for her debut novel "God of small things" in 1997. Unlike other female writers, she took the less travel path through her works. Her works involves the harsh reality of society. She never showed any hesitation either to write or speak on any felonious issue. As a writer, she never chooses to write fantasy, fairy tale or romance but she prefers to decode the suffering of mankind. Apart from God of small thing, her works include 'War is Peace' (2001), 'Power Politics'(2001), 'The Greater Common Good' (1999), 'The End of Imagination' (1998), 'The Algebra of Infinite Justice' (2001), 'The Cost of Living' (1999), 'The Shape of the Beast'(2008), 'Kasmir : The Case for Freedom' (2011), Capitalism: A Ghost story (2014), An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire (2004), War Talk (2003), and The Ministry of Utmost Happiness(2017). All these books addressed to political issues, religious issues, war, Capitalism, Nationalism and the

condition of people in this critical point of time. She got famous for her social activity as well as her participation in many revolt in order to bring change in the society. She is a writer with a cause behind every action; there is an effort to create a better situation for the underprivileged. Today, She is world acclaimed authoress and a successful social activist. She doesn't believe in artificial traditions and manmade history. She questions the taboos, patriarch ways of life, the authority of political power over people that is reflected in her works. Her works are the expression of her disgust, anger, dissatisfaction and sympathy. She admits-

"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 yet 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." (Roy.2017)

Roy has been involved in various protests such as against Sardar Sarover Dam project which took away homes of the poor .She was also against building Narmada dam. She penned down an essay about it named 'The Greater Common Good'. It was not the first time Roy projected the life neglected, in 'God of Small Things' she projected both internal and external struggle of Ipe family ,who lived in a small village in Kerela named Ayemenem. It is an intense text portraying the obsession of Indian society with class system, untouchability, and all kinds of filth that creates hatred, cruel deaths and violence. Moreover it's a story about family and relationships. The novel is told from Rahel's perspective and frequently goes back and forth of time narrating the childhood and adulthood. The scope of the text both personal and

political questioning the orthodox ways of society. She raises question to the odd ways of Indian thinking in 'God of small things'. Roy adds-

"They all broke rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much." (123)

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is not an exception of Roy's style. The book was released in 2017 after a long pause from fiction writing. She sculpted the setting, gave life to the character and gave soul to the story. The story speaks about gender discrimination, religious differences and the political domination that encouraged assassinations of innocent people. The victims are named as accused and they are murder on the name of law. The story revolves around the life of Anjum, a transgender who used to be known as Aftab. Anjum was born in an orthodox middle class Muslim family. Her father never accepted as a child. Her mother, Jahara Begum was terrified of her own child, Her first reaction was to feel her heart constrict and her bones turn to ash. She thought every word in Urdu has a gender either masculine or feminine. She knew that there is nothing in this world is in between but her child is trapped in between. She was anxious about her future whether she will have recognition, status and respect in the society or she will be abandoned.(8) As Aftab grew up he has interest in music but has to give up studies and music as other students teased him. Anxious parents took Aftab to a sexologist named Dr Ghulam Nabi in hope that he may give any solution to heal the girl parts of Aftab. After examining Aftab he said he was not, medically speaking, a Hijra –a female trapped in a male body(16) But Aftab was happy, happier than he had ever been before. There was no war inside Aftab where other transgender fight with society as well as they struggle in accepting themselves. Aftab started mingling with other transgender who lived in Khwabgah. Aftab left his house forever and he turned to Anjum. Anjum finally got a comfortable life and not judged by the community. In India the community still is fighting for their civil rights. Society treated them very indifferently and they are ambiguous about their future. They beg for to survive. In the text Roy has captured the transformation, the plight, the struggle of Anjum which symbolically presented for every transgender living in a democratic country. Society has failed to provide equal rights to the community and they are treated as shame.

Roy has portrayed the dark side multicultural country. There are people of different race, caste, religion and faith live in India. Sometimes, different faiths lost its balance and always

end up in violence. The most often clash was between the Muslims and Hindus. Roy 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. Muslims boys are also arrested in the suspicion of making a terrorist attack. Anjum was saved because the attackers thought that killing Hijra is a sin. Each Muslim was a convict in the eyes of Hindus. So this hatred turns into mass killing whenever they find any issue. On 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 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 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.

Other than presenting a story through the perspective of a neglected and unaccepted transgender, she also exposed the inhuman treatment to the Dalits. These Dalits never get a chance to develop themselves as lack of awareness and knowledge, they became the victim of injustice.

“In 2008 the situation 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)

As she described the situation of such underprivileged Dalits ,who are forced to leave they own native place and deprived from their civil rights. Roy presented the lives naxals in the forest. They are don't chose 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 incidents. She left her child because she cannot take care of her. She was raped by police man who are on duty and resulted this child. As she has to live in forest ,she gave up the child for her future. This was the reality which never heard or seen. Poor women had to shut her mouth. As it is believed that it's easy to suppress a woman. The scream of women is always remain unheard. They are taught to bear all the pain silently just because they live in a society where all laws are made to control life of women in name of culture and tradition. Another important character of the novels. Tillotama also humiliated and gone through mental torture as she married to a militant named Musa. Arifa and Miss Jebeen also shot to death in the violence in Kashmir. The political interference in Kashmir lead to many deaths and has influenced the peace of the whole country. As the writer pus it Kashmir will make India self-destructive. Roy has been protesting against the government projects which forced people to sacrifice their wellbeing. She has been standing for the rights of women. Through her writing she makes her voice more loud. In her interview with John Cusack she reveals her noble intentions. She says-

“While there is no real opposition to him in the parliament, India's a very interesting place...there is genuine on the ground opposition. If you travel around – there are all kinds of people, brilliant people.. journalists, activists, filmmakers , Whether you go to Kashmir , the Indian part, or to an Adivasi village about to submerged by a dam reservoir-the level of understanding of everything we have talked about-surveillance, globalization, Ngo-ization- is so high, you know? The wisdom of resistance movements which are ragged and tattered and pushed to the wall, is incredible. So ... I look to them and keep the faith” (65)

Roy used the metaphor of a tree to describe the life of Anjum. She describes-

“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" (3)

In the very first paragraph Roy made very clear the protagonist Anjum is an epitome of strength, patience and power. She has the courage to accept the feminine side as well as the nasty opinion of people about her being a transgender. She has the power to transform the graveyard into a heaven for herself and create a new world. As a tree she also opened the doors for other helpless rejected people. Roy completely contradict the believe of the society that transgender are abnormal. Roy showed concerns for the growing environmental decay due to deforestation, sewage system and mining projects affecting the ecosystem. As per the government's order Adivasi forced to leave their village so that they can build industries and town. It not only affect the inhabitant bot also the animals that live in the forest. The Bhopal gas leak incident in India affected the thousand lives. It caused deaths and some of them became permanently blind.

"The Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal sprang a deadly gas leak that killed thousands of people. The newspapers were full of accounts people trying to flee the poisonous cloud that perused them, their eyes and lungs on fire. There was something almost biblical about the nature and the scale of horror." (151)

The poor is exploited in every other way for the benefit of the nation economy. There is a very narrow space for the queers in Indian literature. Sexuality always remains taboo in our conservative society. Those matters never discussed publically so the space for transgender remain inside the walls taboo. Their lives remain a forbidden story. They are neither encouraged to have a better life nor get help from anyone. Some of writers have written on sexuality emphasizing on their place in the society. Some writers attempted to explore the space, 'The Pregnant King' and 'Shikhandi: And other Tales They Don't tell you' by Devdutt Pattanaik explains the origin of queers in the mythical texts of ancient ages. Other than that 'She of the Mountains' by Vivek Shraya and 'Funny Boy' by Shyam Selva durai explores the sexuality as well as social and political inferences in the personal interest of the individuals. Arundhati Roy is known for her presentation of unconventional subjects, in this particular work she choose the unspoken, ignored, underestimated Hijra. India is never a utopia for the trans genders. They are abandoned from the mainstream society. The homophobic society

never treated them as complete human beings. They lost their identity and remain silent. Roy exposed the small world of transgender with bigger complications in desperate need of help. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is a complete satire aiming to attack the ways of patriarch society and where a transgender beg for their place, women are raped and bound to seize their lips, abandoned lives of dalits and Hindus and Muslims war. The blind government taking all of 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 less. The story takes us through the lanes between the graveyards to Valley, forest to protest field, and silent tears to demonstration. Apart from a social reformer, Roy is famous for her wonderful use of words. Each every word of her work has a purpose. Her remarks about the political situation always attracted controversy because very few writers use the medium of literature to speak the truth. She never thought of popularity or awards or rejections. But she always attempts to sooth the wounds of the excluded crowd. She tries to see through their eyes, aims to console them, help them and stand with them.

References

1. Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 3rd Ed, Manchester UP, 2008.
2. Roy ,Arundhati. *The God of small things*. Penguin Random House India,1997.
3. _____.*Things that can and cannot be Said*. Juggernaut Books India,2016.
4. _____.*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Penguin Random House India,2017.
5. Interview with ArundhatiRoy.<<http://www.kyotojournal.orgthe-journal/conversations/arundhati-roy-on-fame-writing-and-india>>/.Last Accessed on25.3.2018