

## **Marginality and Violence in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness***

**Supriya Mandal**

Research Scholar, M. Phil,  
University of Gour Banga,  
Former Guest Lecturer of  
Malda Govt. Diet College, India

### **Abstract**

'Marginalization' is a process of segregation of the socio-culturally, economically, politically and religiously underprivileged group. Marginalization is an inequitable behaviour towards the minorities and weaker sections of the society by the majorities or stronger sections. Dalits, untouchables, tribals, muslims, transgenders and female are generally regarded as marginal or peripheral. So, they are vulnerable to exploitation. Arundhati Roy's latest novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a registered account of violence on the marginals. The novel incarnates the lynching of thousand minorities in Gujrat riot in 2002, mass slaughtering of three dalit men on the rumour of cow slaughtering, the disrespectful demolition and humiliation of an untouchable soldier S. Murugesan's statue for the audacious erection on the edge of touchable's village, the eviction and execution of tribal in Operation Green Hunt in 2009, and humiliation, rejection and segregated life of Transgenders. The novel unfolds the upliftment of Hindutva and their atrocities on the non- Hindus. The objective of this paper is to portray the plight of marginal people in caste ridden India and the violence coming into their life physically and mentally.

**Keywords-** *Marginality, Violence, Racism, Hindutva, Subalternity*

### Introduction

Arundhati Roy is indisputably acclaimed and recognized as a revolutionary and an iconoclast in her writings. In her debut award winning novel *The God of Small Things* she talked about the marginalisation of Valutha the untouchable by the hand of Upper caste Syrian Christian, Communist Party and police, and the domination and sexual violence on Ammu in the hands of tradition bound patriarchy. The present novel is also a tale of exploitation, humiliation, rejection and brutalization of marginalised, and subaltern people in the hands of elite class who take the place of coloniser after the segregation of those underdogs from the main stream of society. Through her mature narrative Roy adumbrates not only the humiliation and hounding of untouchable but also the wretched state of Muslims in a majoritarian Hindu country, the subjugation of women in the hands of patriarchy, the deprivation of Transgenders and Tribals from their rights. This paper showcases those violence upon the marginals.

The novel unobtrusively opens with the piteous segregation of Anjum, the transgender protagonist who used to be Aftab. She takes refuge in a desolate, wizard Graveyard. The first reading of the novel will make one strike by the question, why a living person takes refuge in a Graveyard. The later section of the novel answers the very question. She was born as a transgender in a lower middle class orthodox Muslim family. After the revelation of her cross gender identity, her mother was awestruck. Though she was not primarily rejected by her family but when she finds her happiness in Khwabgah with the 'hijras', she was rejected by her father. Roy depicts the plight of the Transgenders in a democratic country like India where all people have the same civil rights. She (Anjum) asserts her Flyover Story where she and her colleagues were "dragged out of the Matador, kicked on their backsides as though they were circus clowns and instructed to scream" (35) and they were forced to run all the way to shun the arrest in charge of obscenity and prostitution. Again she renders her bitter and gruesome experience in Gujrat pogrom. Thousands of Muslims were lynched by the invigorated Hindu patriots. Zakir Mian faced death but Anjum was left "alive. Un-killed. Un-hurt. Neither folded nor unfolded. She alone"(63). At that time they thought that they might be blessed with good fortune if they left the transgenders unhurt, "Nahi yaar, mat maro, Hijron ka maarna apshagun hota hai. Don't kill her, brother, killing Hijras brings bad luck" (62).

She was forced to huddle into the men's refugee camp in men's accoutrement. The repudiation of the idea of helping to the so called 'dunia', "Arre, Doctor Sahib, which Poor would want to be helped by us?"(56), the diffidence on their motherly affection, 'Hijra kidnapping little boys and castrating them' (53) - all these shattered her completely and dragged her to the Graveyard. Even today we have the same experience of their plight. Family refuse them, they are forced to beg alms in

train, traffic signals or engaged in prostitution. Even today, in the age of modernisation we have failed to provide them proper schooling, job and sanitation. Like Anjum there are thousands with their ambiguity and marginal identity:

She, is a woman trapped in a man's body... She, who never knew which box to tick, which queue to stand in, which public toilet to enter (Kings or Queens? Lords or Ladies? Sirs or Hers)...She, augmented by her ambiguity... (122).

The novel is a perfect depiction of violence upon the Muslims by the jingoistic Hindu right wing which was implicitly supported by the then political power. As per article 19 of Indian constitution, no discrimination will be practiced on the ground of religion, sex and race but Indian society always discriminated or segregated on the basis of religion, race, class and gender. The Indian political leaders who have been given the charge to govern the country fail to maintain their oath towards the country. Roy expresses the violation of constitutional oath which has been taken by the then Poet-Prime Minister. He addressed all Muslim community as 'terrorist', 'The Mussalman, he doesn't like the Others', he said poetically in Hindi, and paused for a long time... 'His Faith he wants to spread through Terror'... Each time he said Muslim or Mussalman his lips sounded as endearing as a young child's" (41).

He stigmatized Muslims as terrorist and delimits their fundamental rights as human beings. Anjum also delineates that Zainab is very lucky for being a girl. At that period Muslim boys were killed in encounter and arrested in charge of planning terrorism. Through the help of new law the suspects were taken under custody without trial for months. Anjum reminisced the terrible 'Godhara' incident. Thousands of Muslims were slaughtered. She addressed the miscreants as Newton's Army who were 'deployed to deliver an Equal and Opposite Reaction'. All the saffron parakeets were squawking together, "Mussalman ka ek hi sthan! Qubristan ya Pakistan! Only one place for the Mussalman! The Graveyard or Pakistan" (62).

The massacres were everywhere, at homes, business places, shops, and hospitals. The police were also a part of the mob. They did not lodge any missing dairy during the riot period. Zakir Mian had been brutally murdered but Anjum had been able to save herself for the traditional belief. When Zakir Mian's son went to Ahamedabad in search of his father, he had to shave his beard and tie red thread in his hand to pass the mob. After a shattered return, Anjum's fearful assumption was that "Gujrat could come to Delhi any day"(48). People were not safe in any part of country. Muslims were debarred from employment in security agency. We see Saddam Hussain to use his real name Dayachand for his employment in security guard because he was aware that in those days how difficult it was to arrange a security guard job with a Muslim name. Forceful sterilization in the name of population control

diminished their personal freedom. Though India was declared as a Secular country but the Muslims as minority always faced brutal massacre sometime as a revenge of heinous incident like Akshardham and sometime as a punishment of beef eating. They are regarded as terrorist when they demand their rights and freedom and sometime they are stratified as 'terrorist', and it is supposed that they work as the risk factor for the nations security and they 'do not deserve Human Rights!'(115).

Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally endings as revolutionary (Dangle 264-65).

The above quotation of Arjun Dangle is very much relevent in the present context of the novel. Actually the word 'Dalit' made its emergence from Sanskrit word 'dalita', that means 'oppressed'. In Indian socio-cultural system 'dalits' are considered as untouchables and belong to the lowest strata of caste based society. The word dalit came into prominence in 1930s from Marathi and Hindi translation of the term 'depressed classes'. In 1970s the term was ressurected by 'Dalit Panthers' and extended its subject with the inclusion of poor peasants, deprived tribes, women and all those being exploited economically, politically and in the name of religion. Arundhati Roy picturizes their oppression in her present novel.

The novelist pinpoints vehemence towards dalit and untouchables. How they got deprived from their basic rights is beautifully portrayed in the novel. Saddam Hussain who in reality is a dalit accounts his bitter experience in ingrained caste systematic India. He worked in a mortuary and his duty was to handle the cadaver but he was to execute the post- mortem. Roy depicts the attitude of upper caste Hindu doctors who themselves do not perform this task for the fear of being polluted. The author depicts how they (Upper caste doctors) looked down upon them (Untouchables) who performed this kind of work and the doctors stood in a safe distance by masking their mouth. The lower caste people are degraded not only by the upper caste Hindu but also by the police, the preserver of law. The author depicts the heinous experience of Saddam Hussain. The police atrocities and humiliation forced him to renounce his religion and this accelerated his inclination from a dalit towards Islam. This transformation was a consequence of his revengeful zeal for brutal slaughtering of his father in front of Dulina police station. He changed his name from Dayachand to Saddam Hussain after being mesmerised by the courageous or boastful death of Saddam Hussein, the President of Iraq. Saddam's narration of mass slaughtering of his community including his father and other men was terribly shaky. As a result of indebtedness of his father to pay the more demanded 'cut', they were alleged for supposedly rumour of cow slaughtering and they were lynched .The people who ate

beef were beaten to death by the mob. The mobs who were invigorated by Hindu ideology of 'Gau Raksha', butchered the men on the basis of rumour. Saddam was too small to presume the circumstance and his inability to understand the incident mingled him with the invigorated crowd. He was 'part of the mob' that killed his father. Saddam was terrified by the sight- "Everybody watched. Nobody stopped them" (89). The blood of his father was flowing "as if it were rainwater, how the road looked like a street in the old city on the day of Bakr-Eid (89). The government made the 'Holy Cow' national emblem and the 'Gau Rakshak Bahini' got enough power to utilize their atrocities. Their atrocities were at the culmination that terrified any muslim or untouchable to give shelter the old cow. That's why Anjum told the inhabitants of Graveyard to drive away the old cows ( to shun the allegation of cow slaughtering) because:

If they (cows) die here – not if, when they die – they'll say you killed them and that will be the end of all of you...You have to be very careful ...If they want to kill you they will kill you whether you are careful or not, whether you've killed a cow or not, whether you have even set eyes on a cow or not (402) .

The reincarnation of the incident like Saddam's father made them aware about the exploitation. Five Dalits were humiliated when they were returning from collecting carcasses of dead cows. They protested and denied to work for upper caste Hindus. The rejuvenation of Dalit charmed Saddam and he renounced his idea of revenge,—"my people have risen up! They are fighting! What is one Sehrawat for us now? Nothing !"(407). In every culture and society the violence upon the marginal is found. The present novel is not an exception to this case. Here the violence is seen in much more horrible way. But the interesting fact is that the dalits start resisting against the dominion.

The novel is a living example of racism. S.Murugesan, a soldier, died from an explosion. He was from lower caste and he was always treated with humiliation by his fellow soldiers. Even after his death, the high caste did not allow his body to pass their houses. So, the Government who made a documentary film on him for the grand narration about the valour of army and their sacrifice for the sake of country became futile. It did not make him earn to get enough respect. Even when his statue was erected at the beginning of the village, some higher caste people did not like that "an Untouchable man's statue put up at the entrance" (318). It seems audacious to them (upper caste) to face the statue of an untouchable at the village entrance. So the amputation of the statue was emergent and thus the disfigurement of the statue made the higher caste people feel egoistical pride.

The Tribal or Adivasis confined themselves in forests and some outskirts because they were never allowed to come in the mainstream society. They were marginalized on the basis of their unsophisticated, uncivilised and undeveloped life style. So they are vulnerable for easy exploitation.

The very Government who preaches the same access of opportunity, accelerates the eviction process without proper rehabilitation. The Government engaged 'police, Cobras, Greyhounds, Andhra Police' and Paramilitary Forces. They killed the adivasis and burnt the village, -

They take everything, burn everything, steal everything...They want adivasi people to vacate forest so they can make a steel township and mining (421).

The very truculence and deprivation formulate Naxalite and Maoist uprising. The portrayal of Revathy's horrendous experience in the hands of six policemen was terrible:

There was six policemen around me. One was cutting my skin with a knife-blade ... They are smoking and putting their cigarettes on me ... 'you are a great heroine. You supply them with bullets, malaria medicines, food, toothbrushes... How many innocent girls have you sent to join your Party? You are spoiling everyone. Now you go and marry someone. Settle down quietly. But first we will give you some marriage experience.' They kept on burning me and cutting me...all raped me many times... (422-23).

Women are considered as most marginal in all strata of society. Roy's both novels registered this account of women's marginality and their exploitation on basis of their marginality. In *The God of Small Things* Ammu faced physical and mental torture in police station by the police officer as she dared to love an untouchable man. In her present novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, S.Tillotama also faced same violence because of her daring love for a Kashmiri Militant, Musa . ACP Pinki shaved her hair as her discretion to love a militant. She was shamelessly taunted by rigorous questions several times,-"How many men do you fuck at the same time?"(381). Society always tries to oppress women either by patriarchal domination or by age-old inhibition. Instead of mute submission to her husband's wrong doing Ammu took divorce. That decision led her to the verge of rigorous torture. Tilo's decision to stay alone and her unwillingness to become a mother thrust her to the same verge of mental torture. Like Ammu, she (Tilo) has to face the lewd suggestion from patriarchal society. So, those kinds of violence were everywhere, and in every spheres of life.

The novelist portrays the doubly-marginalized condition of prostitutes. Firstly, they are marginalized as women and then as 'sex workers' that delimit their all rights. They are in more wretched condition than the women. To highlight their utmost helplessness the novelist narrates the story of Anwar Bhai, the pimp of GB Road brothel house. One of his girls Rubina 'suddenly died of a burst appendix'. The authority discharged her body with eyes missing. The hospital authority informed them with a fictitious story that "rats had got to them in the mortuary" (78). But the original version of story was another:

...Rubina's eyes had been stolen by someone who knew that a bunch of whores and their pimp were unlikely to complain to the police (78).

Even they "could not find a bathhouse to bathe Rubina's body, a graveyard to bury her in, or an imam to say prayers" (78). The process of marginalization snatches their right and even they cannot protest against exploitation.

Once Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak in her influential essay "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" regards that subaltern cannot speak because s/he has to express herself/himself through colonizer's language. Various Third World and Fourth World writers demystify her concept by writing in their regional language and expose the hegemonic domination of the upper class/caste society. They delineate exploitation, domination and violence on the basis of class, caste, creed and religion. Besides the writings of Bama, Sharankumar Limbale, Om Prakash Valmiki, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, *Coolie* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* are the greatest specimen of the marginality and the violence occurring on the lives of the characters. In this way Roy's narrative draws out miscellaneous example of melancholia, suffering, injustice, degradation, deprivation and exploitation in the lower section of society. She is in favour of giving equal importance to every human being and she is against sadistic behaviour that comes from caste prejudices and religious biasness.

## Conclusion

Thus, the novel expresses Roy's humanitarian concern and her reformist zeal for society through the portrayal of violence on the marginals. A kaleidoscopic study of the novel reveals that she has been greatly touched by the respective society towards the treatment of transgenders, muslims, dalits, untouchables, tribals and women. Roy tries to emphasize on the predicament on the marginals in our society. She tries to raise conscience and makes the readers aware of all irregularities, ills, moral and spiritual maladies and injustices on the downtrodden sections of the society. She is keen observer of day to day events of society and picturizes all of these events in her novel artistically.

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