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### NORMALIZING TARNISHED BODIES: A MAXIST ANALYSIS OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The present research study is an effort to explore the issues of class struggle and survival of the individuals who are considered outcast, belonging to transgender community, an untouchable class; and occupied states in India, with reference to Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (Roy, 2017) under the framework of Marxist theory (Rummel, 1977). The context of 'class struggle', 'Base and Superstructure' by Karl Marx is the fundamental approach which has been utilized to observe and analyze the text. The study of the novel highlights how these individuals living with physical and mental traumas struggle against the capitalistic society to normalize themselves in an intolerant socio-economic and political atmosphere; and what obstructions they face to behave as normal people around them. The Marxist approach in the text reflects how the class difference and domination of bourgeois controls different threads of the various marginalized and underprivileged communities in terms of their existence in the society where an eruption of communal violence is a power-show game in politics to propagate all the false ideologies in the name of religion and nationalism. The aim of this research is to find out how far less-privileged and tarnished individuals, and freedom seekers are able to recover and feel normalized in an established capitalized society on the social, political and ideological basis.

## INTRODUCTION

Class struggle and difference between the powerful and the weaker one has been a continuous subject of discussion since the development of human critical thinking. Many critics and writers have portrayed the picture of the social and political suppression committed by the bourgeois class on the economically less-privileged individuals. Marxism is the theory which addresses the social and political issues on the basis of class conflict between the privileged and unprivileged individuals. This theory was formulated in *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848 against Capitalism. According to them theory of Capitalism exploits the working class economically and it further leads to social and political inequality. There are three levels of class struggle; economical, ideological and political, but Marta Harnecker refers Lenin's words as "every class struggle is a political struggle" (Harnecker, 2017, p. 32). Moreover, Emil Oversveen finds that "Marx in particular highlights the tendency of capitalism to replace traditional and hierarchical social relations with an expanded and impersonal economic system in which people at least formally are endowed with equal social rights" (Oversveen, 2021, p. 448).

The theory of Marxism is strongly connected to literature as art is a part of social and political ideologies. In this regard, Terry Eagleton interprets that, "For Marx, then, the ability of art to manifest human powers is dependent on the objective movement of history itself. Art is a product of the division of labour" (Eagleton, p.68) and it separates material from intellect. Different literary texts can be analyzed in Marxist perspective specifically in modern era, *A Doll's House*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Things Fall Apart* and many others works are the true representation of Marxist ideology. In these works, characters are found struggling against the oppression, social, economic and political inequality in human relations.

In present time, Arundhati Roy is one of those writers who has the nerves to challenge an established reality, but based on false ideologies. Arundhati Roy is an actress, political, social and human right activist and mainly a well-recognized author. She was born in Kerala, India to a Christian mother and a Bengali father. Her two novels; *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* with other collections of political based issues have received global acclaim. She is also winner of Booker prize 1997 for her 1<sup>st</sup> novel, *The God of Small Things*, which was published in 1997. Her second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* published in 2017, draws attention towards socio-politically and economically deprived strata of the society divided on the basis of Upper-Caste, lower-caste and ideologically different Muslim, Transgender, Dalit, Kashmiri and other freedom seeking communities which are tarnished under a capitalist system.

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is the collection of untold stories in a shattered and non-linear narrative in vast range of subjects, which allows each intricate character a space to tell its painful story in a more lucid manner and carefree style as she writes, "How to tell a shattered story? By slowly becoming everybody. No. By slowly becoming everything" (Roy, 2017, p.436). Parul Sehgal describes her writing style that "The world she conjures is often brutal,

but never confusing or even very complex” (Sehgal, 2017). This novel opens up in Graveyard later named as ‘Jannat Guest House’ where Anjum, a transgender witnesses the death of the vultures by eating the dead cows poisoned with cow-aspirin (Diclofenac) to get more milk production to meet the needs of capitalist overpopulated cosmopolitan city as, “The first historical fact is the production of the means to satisfy these needs” (Chambre, Mclellan & David, 2020). Roy has portrayed the issues of minorities, outcast individuals fighting against political, economic and religious discrimination in a very realistic manner. Characters are the true representation of class division. Biplab, Naga and Major Amik Singh depict bourgeois class and authority whereas, Anjum, Musa, Saddam Hussain, Zainab and Miss Jabeen the second are the part of lower class and outcast communities.

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, two stories run parallel. One revolves around Anjum (Hijra) and other Tilo (An architect and activist) Anjum, a hermaphrodite, earlier born as boy, named Aftab becomes the subject of discussion as he grows. Children talk about him, “He’s a She. He is not He or a She. He is a He and a She. She-He, He-She Hee! Hee! Hee!” (Roy, 2017, p. 12). Even his own mother Jehanara Begum questions his status of gender in these words, “Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman. Everything except her baby” (Roy, 2017, p. 7). There is an outside word of ‘Hijra’ which is not normal in daily language so here the questions rise that is it possible to exist outside language, outside ‘normal’ world. Even his father’s attempt to convert him to a complete male where the guarantee of his ‘tendencies’ is not assured. He still struggles to manage money by cutting down the other expenditures of home. Later on, at the age of adolescence, Aftab left the house to reside in ‘Khawbgah’ (name of transgenders’ place and adapted a female name ‘Anjum’). This place is the whole world for him where he feels ‘normal’. His effort to leave the house and choose another place is only for the pursuit of happiness and satisfaction, but another transgender Nimmo utters bitter reality and challenges of their life in these words, “The war is *inside* us. Indo-Pak is *inside* us. It will never settle down. It can’t” (Roy, 2017, p.23).

Roy has elaborated the situation of Indian society divided on different levels in a very lucid manner. She has drawn a picture which shows a sharp contrast in the experiences of the individuals of the progressing nation. A sarcastic glimpse of the capitalist society tells the ruthless behavior of the elite class who ruined the poor villagers and their right of properties to build skyscrapers and shopping malls to fulfill the demands of powerful and modern Indian society. The result was that “Villages were being emptied, Cities too. Millions of people were moved, but nobody knew where to” (Roy, 2017, p.98). The role of media is also portrayed ironically as the reporters ask such empty questions to the victims that how is like to be poor and what they feel like and at the end media experts conclude, “Somebody has to pay the price for the progress” (Roy, p.99). This was only to make India ‘Great’ and to give it a global impact through marketing and showing, abundance of international brands as she beautifully narrates the words of Indian nationals,

But the food shops were bursting with food. The bookshops were bursting with books. The shoe shops were bursting with shoes. And people (who counted as

people) said to one another, 'You don't have to go abroad for shopping any more. Imported things are available here now. See, like Bombay is our New York, Delhi is our Washington and Kashmir is our Switzerland. It's like really *saala* fantastic *yaar*.' (p.99)

This is the hypocrisy and the contrast which Roy has showed in a sarcastic tone. From these skyscrapers and malls a few miles away, reality is different where air was poisonous with bountiful of mosquitoes bathing in ponds and surplus mothers singing songs to their surplus children for sleep.

The evidence of intercommunal violence in Gujrat 2002, can also be observed in this novel where Roy sarcastically describes the whole riot. She unveils the political intentions that how politicians run their election campaigns on the dead bodies, involving communities in religious uprisings. It was the riot in which Anjum became victim with Zakir Mian and Zakir mian lost his life and Ajum survived due to his intersexuality. This had a deep impact on Anjum and she realized being part of outer 'normal' world is not key to happiness. Khawbgah was a holy place as according to Ustad Kulsoom, "because it was where special people, blessed people, came with their dreams that could not be realized in the Duniya. In the Khawbgah, Holy souls trapped in the wrong bodies were liberated" (Roy, p.53).

Another tragic incident which happened to Another character who was normal in the perspective of gender but, an outcast, a Dalit turned 'Saddam Hussain. His father was killed again in a religious conflict of cow slaughter constructed by a station house officer on not fulfilling his demand for the money he asked for and the killing of his father and his friends was intensely cruel, Saddam Hussain expresses, "This was what our people did, when cows died, upper-caste farmers would call us to collect the carcasses-because they could not pollute themselves by touching them" (Roy, p. 86). "Everybody watched. Nobody stopped them" (Roy, p.89). That incident was like a show for the spectators and they found themselves entertained like, "Everybody watched. Nobody stopped them" (P.89). After this deplorable incident of his life he became rebellious and inspired by the bravery of Saddam Hussain, president of Iraq, that he adapted his name and inclined towards Islam where he could free himself from the chains of caste system and act normal in his community.

The appearance of various communities like Dalits, Transgenders, communists' revolutionaries, dreamers and people from all walks of life in *Jnatar mantar* is the panoramic description of political, economic and social insight of the Indian society. It was the protest by socially and economically deprived strata of society which was later hooked on by two popular political parties and Nationalists. The Cause of the protest was suppressed somewhere after getting politicized. One Party was carrying the slogans against corruption led by Gandhian leader. "His dream of a society free of corruption was like a happy meadow in which everybody, including the most corrupt, could graze for a while" (P.100). The workers of the other party were provoked by Nationalist theme were roaring, "Doodh maangogey to kheer dengey! Kashmir maangogey to chiir dengey" (p.103). Here, Roy highlights the biased attitude of media which was busy to cover political slogans and suppressed the actual voices to be heard

as Mothers of the Disappeared were there to record their protest against the humiliation of human rights, but media continuously ignored their presence as , “No Tv camera pointed at that banner,not even by mistake”(p.115). So, their trip to Delhi was not voiced and addressed. It seemed that Muslims did not deserve human rights.

With other protests there at Jantar Manta, there is another character named Dr. Azad Bhartyia. He truly presents a review of the real issues and vices of Indian capitalist society which Roy has given her voice through that socialist character of Bhartyia. He records his protest in the form of written documents and fasting. It can be read from his card board sign,

I am fasting against the following issues: I am against the Capitalist Empire, plus against US Capitalism, Indian and American state terrorism/ All Kinds of Nuclear Weapons and Crime/plus against the bad Education System/ Corruption, Violence/Environmental degradation and All Other Evils. Also I am against unemployment. I am also fasting for the complete obliteration of the entire Bourgeois Class (Roy, p.126). His documents genuinely invite public to analyze their capitalist society in detail where he narrates the story of US president's visit to India and the treatments presidents' dogs enjoy in lavish hotel. On the other hand, a common Indians cannot afford their regular food on daily basis and they have no place to reside respectfully. This is the contrast which is the flaw of capitalist system controlled by Bourgeois class. Dr.Azad Bhatyia further, describes the outer splendor this system offers, “Capitalism is like a poisoned honey. People swarm to it like bees” (Roy, p.129). This bold depiction of the hollow political criticism by Azad Bhartyia leads him to Police custody because authorities cannot digest truth which is against their interests; of money making by suppressing the weaker ones.

The ground of Jantar Manter leads to another story of Tilo (S.Tilottama) which is unfolded with the appearance of a baby who was actually abandoned by Maoist activist lady raped by Indian militants. She later gave birth to that human creature who was mirror image of Tilo in appearance and birth history. Saddam Hussain and Anjum also witnessed the presence of that baby. But later she also was disappeared suddenly. No one could find the trace of her. She was carried by Tilo (an activist), who named her Miss Jabeen the second after the name of her lover, Musa's daughter. Tilo was an illegitimate daughter of Syrian Indian woman. She was an architect student at college in Delhi where three men fell in love with her. They were Biplab, Naga and Musa. Later on, Biplab became a beaurocrat, Naga, a renowned journalist and Musa, A Kashmiri freedom fighter. Two stories of Anjum and Tilo intersect with the abduction of the baby at Jnatar Mantar who was later marked out by Saddam Hussain and Anjum. At that time Tilo returns from Kashmir after spending many years where she observes violence, torture, kidnapping and ruthless killing of Kashmiri freedom fighters and innocent people by Indian forces. Roy also has emphasized the hypocrisy of the Kashmiris among themselves who were divided on the basis of political power and the true freedom seekers as she observes the situation, “They grafted the language of God and freedom, Allah and Azadi, on to their murders and scams. They made off with money and property and women” (Roy, p.314). Kashmir is proved a junction of meeting of four college fellows at different

points after years later. Tilo spends time and makes love with Musa whose wife and daughters have been killed in the struggle of freedom, but her connection with Musa creates suspect about her, and she marries Naga for the protection. Later on she divorces herself and rents an apartment of Biplab, another admirer of her. But after adopting a baby she feels unsafe and is directed to the 'Jannat Guest House' established by Anjum in Muslims Cemetery.

Jannat Guest House, later developed as business and community center, is the symbol of peace and solace. It embraces all the tarnished, abandoned and dislocated individuals whom superstructure of the society fails to adopt as normal beings. There is a close distance between the dead and alive ones in the graveyard, but this close distance has all the ministry of happiness. It dissolves all the worldly divisions of class, religions, gender and caste. It is the place which turns differences and abnormalities into normality. It is the imaginary world which Roy has created where dissimilar becomes similar. It can be concluded Roy has voiced number of diverse unvoiced communities. She has shown such minute details that it seems she herself has experienced those stories on individual basis. Her keen desire to make normal out of abnormal leads to fabrication of the story where this is only possible in an imaginary world near to cemetery so that they can't feel much difference between life and death. Boundaries are blurred as there is no peace beyond the death and in Musa's words, "Only dead are free" (Roy, p.355).

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