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SOCIO-POLITICAL REALISM IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S 'THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST  
HAPPINESS': A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Arthur Schopenhauer, a German philosopher said that, "All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident." The mentioned quote clarifies the clear notion of political understanding in the real world. As the lines suggested, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, elucidates the tragic reality of politics behind the lives of common people. Arundhati Roy's second novel discusses political and historical events took place in India. It includes religious violence, religious and gender identity. The objective of the paper is to analyse socio-political realism and gender discrimination in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.

Keywords: realism, gender identity, politics, religion, discrimination.

Introduction

Arundhati Roy's work is often interpreted as "realist impulse". The concept of realism is understood in Roy's representation of real events and fictional characters in the novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. It proposes both political and humanistic traits of everyday people. Roy's criticism of realism takes into account both her desire to engage with contemporary history and her concern about how effectively literature can capture suffering. Roy reframes the literary idea of realism in the novel in order to address the aftereffects of nonfictional depictions of politics and history.

Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, she uses multiple perspectives to tell a layered, multidimensional story that spans the Indian Subcontinent and multiple decades. The novel opens with Aftab, a hermaphrodite born in Old Delhi and undergoes gender re-assignment surgery to become a complete woman. Then the story moves around Tilo a young and mysterious character who lived independently; and other socially disrupted characters like Saddam, Zainab, Musa and Comrade Revathy. Roy includes historical events like Godhra train Carnage of 2002 and Kashmir exodus in 1990's. The following sections will explore realistic account on the novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.

Theoretical Framework

Weber's work on stratification was associated with the class classification. He was interested in Marx's ideology of conflict but did not always agree with his beliefs. He firmly believed that stratification could not be

eliminated. Weber's view on Stratification is highlighted in John Scott's article, as he referred stratification types. He categorised a society into three types; power, class, and status. These three categories were also known as the three factors of stratification, as people in the same class experience the same lifestyle and have the same number of possibilities for progress.

1. Class: Conflict theories have explored how stratification snatches the opportunities of poor sections of society to progress. As a result of the class in which Weber defined the economic position, society has been categorised into four types listed in the following.
2. Status: Weber argued in this part that while the community may not have the same economic level, they share the same status owing to reputation and place in society.
3. Power: It deals with political forces in the framework of power. For example, throughout revolutions, religions held an important place in society. They maintained decision-making power.

Here, the novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* holds Max Weber's class division theory as the characters carries out multiple oppressions from the society; that includes gender divisions, religious differences and status domination. The characters in the novel undergo social stratification in many dimensions.

### **Realism & Realism in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness***

George Levine in his collection of essays, he defines realism as "Realism is in its very nature a paradoxical form" (Levine, 15). Here, the general goal of realism in the arts is to convey the subject matter as accurately, naturally, and without the use of speculative or supernatural elements as possible. Britannica's article defines realism as "Realism rejects imaginative idealization in favour of a close observation of outward appearances." Generally there are four characteristics of realism. They are rejecting Romantic ideals, representing true subjects, focusing on everyday people, settings, and situations; and responding to a new national emphasis on workers.

The fictional timeline, plot, and characters in Roy's book frequently display her realistic writing style and create a feeling of openness, but he instead encourages readers to relentlessly examine the inconsistencies in his purportedly genuine assertions. Its "realist" element might be interpreted as a constant struggle between truth claims and self-reflection.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, spans from 1990s to the present and it interweaves the stories of various characters. The story partly set in Delhi and in Kashmir. Aftab becomes Anjum, a glamorous, affectionate woman. The 18-year-old Anjum then begins to reside along with other hermaphrodites or transsexuals in a place called "Khwabgah," meaning "House of Dreams." Anjum starts living a prosperous life as a Hijra; as she frequently been featured as a transgender advocate in TV programmes, newspapers, and publications. It is possible to consider Roy's fiction as both a contribution to the current, popular interest in the Hijras in India and as a critique of the Hijra's portrayal as a subject of scholarly investigation. Anjum continued to live in Khwabgah for 30 years and eventually raises a little girl named Zainab to redefine her life.

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the riots of 2002 Ahmedabad is mentioned as a haunted event. The Godhra train carnage refers to the tensions in Ahmedabad, Gujarat in 2002. A dispute between two passengers led to an unforeseen event that resulted in gunfire in which 59 individuals were killed. However, the authorities classified this conflagration as a terrorist attack rather than a case of religious violence. The Muslim community and their assets were the focus. They were dismissed, killed, abducted, and sexually assaulted. Furthermore, their belongings were destroyed, leaving them with nothing. Specifically, Anjum's companion was assassinated by a mob during the 2002 anti-Muslim riots. She abandons her successful life as a member of the Hijra community and flees to a graveyard, broken and haunted by memories of the crimes.

One of the turning point in the novel occurs when Anjum and Saddam Hussein take part in the "India against corruption" protest in Delhi in the summer of 2011 which also remembered as "Hunger Strike"

committed by Aam Aadmi Party. During the protest, they both discover and adopt an abandoned infant; later named it as Miss Udaya Jebeen the Second. The argument regarding an abandoned infant between Anjum and Arvind Kejriwal during the "India against corruption" protest represents a clash between an element of the factual, "realist" dimension of the novel and an element of its fictional, novelistic nature.

Followed by 2002 anti-Muslim riots, the Kashmir Exodus is discussed in the novel. The Kashmir Exodus in the 1990's is a movement against Kashmiri Hindus. The character Musa, Tilo's friend who became affiliated with the Kashmiri separatist, for freedom movement in the late 1990s, which supports for the Muslim-majority territory of Kashmir to separate from Hindu-majority India. In the violence, Musa's wife Arifa and his daughter Miss Jabeen was slaughtered mercilessly. Yet he forgets that hundreds of Hindus were murdered by Islamic extremists after being forced to leave Kashmir valley in the early 1990s.

The Exodus movement is also called as "ethnic cleansing" operation which was organised by Islamic populace in support of Pakistani terrorists and Islamic fundamentalists. The tactics used in this intergroup violence included terrorism, mass migration, rape, massacres, and kidnapping. It merely caused an unrest among communities. This historical event is highlighted in Roy's novel in which the characters Tilo, Musa, Naga and Commander Gulrez involve in its consequences. When Tilo hears that Musa dies in a Kashmir freedom fight, she remembers Musa's word as, "One day Kashmir will make India self-destruct" (TMUH, 440). Amidst the tension, every individual were concerned upon their own community not merely "Kashmir" which is evident in Roy's realistic fiction.

Another central character in the novel is Tilo. She is a half-Dalit and a subaltern, lacks any characteristics of a traditional cultured woman. Tilo, an independent woman, lives alone and does whatever she wants. As a single woman, she poses a subtle challenge to society's orthodox patriarchal framework, which states that a woman cannot live alone. Tilo, as a lady from the Third World, is torn between tradition and modernism. Tilo fought against the system despite her lack of social identity, ancestral roots, and conventional values. Eventually, Roy exposes Tilo as a silent revolutionist and path breaker. Tilo's numerous documented articles influenced the majority of fundamentalists' views on Kashmir.

At the end of the story, Anjum takes her another adopted child, Miss Udaya Jebeen for a walk around Delhi. This time Anjum decides to redefine the social opinions through her community service.

## Conclusion

The narrative of Anjum's character highlights that despite living in a fictional world detached from reality, her life has a complex connection to real, contemporary historical events. The contrast interaction between the fictional character Anjum and the real person Arvind Kejriwal's on a child's adoption and custody proves that *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* as a contemporary "realist" novel. The two characters show the conflicting encounter in the novel between historical document and fictional representation; despite the oppression confronted by the Hijra community.

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