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**THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION: STATE POWER, MINORITY  
IDENTITY AND DEMOCRATIC CRISIS IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE  
MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness presents an incisive critique of India today: the cultivation of the communities and bodies whose lives matter less; the ways in which state power effectively dispossesses citizens' rights in even ostensibly democratic states (or dictatorships pretending to be democracies). The novel spans social and political terrains such as those of transgender lives, religious minorities, Dalits and the people of Kashmir debunking the subtle processes through which state power engenders exclusion and social injustice through inhuman acts. This research studies Roy contention with the connection between state and minority identity through disclosing the inbuilt democratic crisis. The paper, relying on postcolonial theory, subaltern studies and theories of power and exclusion, argues that the novel serves has an oppositional narrative to dominant Nationalist discourses. Roy

foregrounds those who live on the margins and unsettles normative conceptualizations of citizenship and belonging. The analysis illustrates that marginalization is more than a social state of play in the novel; rather, it outlines how political practice does the work of reproducing power across generations- the very essence of the domestic politics revealed. The study further examines how alternative communities, memory and collective solidarity yield resistance. It concludes by arguing that *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a compassionately critical literary engagement with the contemporary Indian debate concerning democracy, identity and human rights abuses, state violence and public ethics.

**Keywords:** Arundhati Roy, state power, minority identity, democratic crisis, exclusion, postcolonialism, Kashmir, subalternity, resistance.

## INTRODUCTION

The modern India, which encompasses the multifaceted political and social concerns of the modern India, namely the issues of nationalism, identity, democracy and social justice have become a focus of attention in the literary map of the contemporary Indian English. In this literary world Arundhati Roy has an important place, as a novelist and as a political activist. Her work is always challenging the dominant narratives of nationhood, and foregrounding the lived lives of marginalized communities that are typically missing from the dominant cultural and political discourse. Winner of the Booker Prize in 1997, *The God of Small Things* is a much more substantial and ambitious look at the geopolitics of India in the real world, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The history is set in a framework of different and co-existing socio-political issues like the religious polarization, caste discrimination, gender marginalization and the land dispute issue of Kashmir. Roy has structured the story in a non-linear and disjunctive way but with a cohesive thread that is able to capture the complexities and sometimes conflicting nature of Indian society. Many of the characters in the novel are transgendered Anjum, thrust into social isolation, the caste-driven Saddam Hussain, and the Kashmiri fighter, Musa, swept up in the long-standing Kashmir conflict. These are all character arcs of impacts of structural violence and systemic marginalization on individuals' life. The exclusion is at the heart of the novel's theme and the political and social philosophy. Exclusion refers to those practices that prevent some people or groups from being fully included in the social, economic, cultural and political life of society. Exclusion is frequently institutionalized in postcolonial settings such as India, based on caste, religion, gender,

ethnicity, and state power. Critical theorists like Gayatri Spivak and Ramachandra Guha have demonstrated that there is an absence or silence of the marginal groups in dominant historical and national discourses, though the marginal groups make significant contribution in the formation of the society. Roy's novel is directly engaged with this question, and foregrounds an often-absent narrative of Indian nationhood; one that foregrounds voices and perspectives. The text also provides a critical analysis of the state power. In the novel, inspired by Michel Foucault's analysis of power as diffused through institutions, discourses and regulatory practices rather than simply in formal authority, the state is presented as a place of control over bodies, identities and political expression. The photographs that depict violence and police brutality in Kashmir and state action reveal the alienating and repressive aspects of state institutions when they are not symbols of democratic practice. In this representation, the idea of a state that is neutral in terms of its protection of rights presents itself as a challenge, and the state is depicted as an instigator of systemic violence against vulnerable groups. The other important part of the novel is its criticism of the democracy in India. India is often recognized as the world's largest democracy, but Roy emphasizes the contradiction between democratic ideals and their lived experiences by minorities and marginalized communities. These episodes of democracy are captured in the novel and highlight the shortcomings of formal democratic institutions in the face of ongoing social inequalities and episodes of political violence. It questions the ability of the democratic system to protect minority rights at times when systems of nationalistic and majority based ideologies dominate public discourse and policy. It also challenges dominant conceptions of identity, repudiating essentialist or fixed views. Identity is fluid, contested, and constructed by political and social conditions for Roy. By calling into question rigid gender binaries and interrogating prevailing social norms of belonging and recognition, Anjum's transgender identity calls into question the norms and boundaries of the dominant social discourse. Similarly, the lives of the Muslim and Kashmiri characters in the book reveal the monitoring of minority identities and their marginalization and suspicion in dominant nationalist discourses and systems of national belonging. In the face of descriptions of suffering and systematic violence, the Ministry of Utmost Happiness is ultimately a vision of resistance. Then the Jannat Guest House turns into a symbolic space that allows the marginalized groups to build alternative communities and forms of belonging, which oppose the hegemony. Collective memory, solidarity, and mutual survival serves as Roy's means of showing resistance moving beyond conditions of extreme polarization and domination. The study looks at the ways in which Roy uses literary narrative

to shed light upon the complexities of state power, minority identity and democratic contestation in present-day India. The research examines how she represents and represents to political marginalization of marginalized groups and their own resistance to political marginalization within the broader field of academic discussions on the nature of postcolonial democracy, citizenship and social justice.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To analyze the portrayal of exclusion and marginalization in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.
2. To examine how state power and minority identities relate in the novel.
3. To explore Arundhati Roy's criticism on the democratic institutions and practices.
4. To explore the role of resistance and alternative communities in challenging exclusion.
5. To assess the novel's contribution to the contemporary or current postcolonial political discourse.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The political, the identity, the resistance- these are some of the themes that have been noted in scholarly writing about Roy. According to Nayar (2017), Roy's fiction is a groundbreaking response to issues of citizenship and belonging in present-day India. Nayar foregrounds the marginalized voices to illuminate the tensions within the nationalist discourse which Roy evokes. Huggan (2001) proposes that postcolonial literature can sometimes be seen as an alternative 'counter-narrative' to the dominant narratives of nationhood. This frame of reference is especially key to Roy's novel, which confronts official state narratives about democracy and national unity. Spivak's (1988) seminal notion of the subaltern could be useful in discussing the representation of the subaltern characters in the novel. Spivak argues that the groups that are marginalized are often left out of the dominant systems of representation and production of knowledge. Guha (1982) also stresses the need to recover subaltern histories and experiences. It is in this intellectual tradition that Roy has given prominence to the voices of transgender, Muslims, Dalit, and Kashmiris, who are often ignored in the mainstream. Foucault's (1980) theory of power emphasizes the disciplinary practices that make up the apparatus by which institutions control social behavior. The depiction of

surveillance, military control and police violence in Kashmir is very similar to Foucauldian interpretation of power. In a space of contestation, identities are negotiated, Bhabha (1994) suggests. Roy's novel depicts fluid identifications that are examples of negotiation and resistance. In everyday practices, social institutions generate exclusion, as Ahmed (2012) discusses. Her work helps to illuminate less obvious manifestations of systemic violence in which minority communities in the novel come across. However, the political aspects of vulnerability and recognition are highlighted by Butler (2004). Being an Anjum, her experiences are a struggle for recognition of the others who don't fall into the normal social categories. Roy's political essays, including *Listening to Grasshoppers* (2009) and *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (2014) also throws light upon the question that arises in the novel. They speak against state violence, neoliberalism and a majoritarian politics. The importance of Kashmir for Roy's fiction has also been emphasized in recent studies. The novel's critics say that the novel is a narrative of Kashmir's crisis of democratic ideals with military surge, monitoring and conflicting claims of sovereignty.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This is a qualitative textual analysis study. This study employs methods of close reading for *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and builds on the foundations offered by postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and theories of power and exclusion. The primary data is textual from the novel, while the secondary data refers to scholarly books and journal articles about postcolonial literature, democracy, identity politics, and state power. It analyses thematic patterns embedded in exclusion, the position of minority, a crisis of democracy, and resistance.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* demonstrates the nature of exclusion as a multidimensional political tool that is used by the state power to control, marginalize and discipline minority populations. Roy not only shows that a transgender experience is not a single case of discrimination but a part and parcel of the structural inequalities that exists in the modern Indian society, but also shows that the experiences of transsexuals, Muslims, Dalits, and Kashmiris are connected to each other.

**Exclusion as a Political Strategy:** An important finding of this study is that the exclusion in the novel is not only a social outcome, but rather a deliberate political approach. The state

and the prevailing social institutions decide who can become a citizen, be seen and protected. Those who deviate from predominant norms are pushed to the margins. Roy's rendition of marginalized communities brings to light the potential for democratic systems to say one thing while doing quite another. This is the contradiction that is represented by the experiences of Anjum. She is a transgender Muslim woman, which means that she is marginalized in her own society from various aspects. Her efforts for recognition bring into focus the shortcomings of law and social structures which favor the normal identity. Roy points to the fact that exclusion is not just an external force, but actually a process that is reproduced over the course of everyday interactions, institutional policies and cultural assumptions that characterize a certain identity as abnormal or undesirable.

**State Power and the Production of Fear:** The novel also illustrates how State power works, in the form of surveillance, militarization and coercion. While drawing attention to Kashmir, Roy highlights the nature of the language of national security, which can legitimize violence against civilian population. The state's power is not just enforced by force, but by narratives which suggest that dissent is a threat to national unity. The depiction of Kashmir shines a light on how democratic governments can take extraordinary measures to champion their sovereignty. Military checkpoints, surveillance networks and arbitrary violence bring a sense of fear to all aspects of life. Roy's portrayal of state intervention as a response to conflict is a criticism of official narratives. Rather, the novel focuses on the personal ramifications of the long-standing militarization and political repression. The Foucauldian perspective brings in the possibility of regulation of knowledge, identity, and public discourse, in addition to direct violence, imposed by the state. People are made power objects in systems that surveil, classify and punish them. One of the most striking examples of the novel is of the use of the concept of the 'minority group' as a suspect group, one that is excluded from democratic processes.

**Minority Identity and the Politics of Belonging:** The other important discovery relates to the relationship between citizenship and minority identity. The whole novel is a struggle for minorities to find a place in which they belong. They are citizens in the legal sense but are excluded from the imaginary nation in the symbolic sense. Muslim characters are often subject to hostility and suspicion, especially in a growingly polarized political climate. Roy illustrates the politicization of religion and its metamorphosis into a sign of difference. As a result, citizenship has become less than solely legal and more about cultural and ideological

conformity. Likewise, the lives of characters who are Dalits and transgendered show how social inequalities persist in the ways that rights, opportunities, and recognition are initiated. The novel implies that democracy is incomplete where ‘the large majority of people remain without dignity or equal participation. The politics of belonging portrayed in the novel thus reveals the disconnection between constitutional conception and reality. Roy proposes that the exclusion is not happening because of a poor definition of what a nation is; instead, it is because dominant conceptions of a nation do not include social diversity.

**Democratic Crisis and the Failure of Institutions:** An important theme of the novel is the critique of democratic institutions. Internationally acclaimed as a democratic country, Roy doubts if democracy can be meaningful when systemic inequalities are left unchecked. The analysis suggests that the institutions set up for the protection of citizens become instruments of exclusion. The failure of law enforcement and political authorities, and the bureaucracy to protect vulnerable groups on a regular basis. These institutions in many cases are actively involved in the production of violence and marginalization. The democratic crisis that is shown in the novel, therefore, is not just one of electoral politics. This is part of a larger trend of eroding Justice, Accountability and Public Trust. Roy presents a conflict between democratic ideals and the majoritarian nationalism, religious polarization, and violence sponsored by the state in a society. The novel foregrounds marginalized voices, allowing it to disrupt triumphalist stories of democracy for which its contradictions are not explored. Roy proposes a reassessment of the connection between democracy and social justice, and offers readers an explanation that democracy is not just about the formal political participation.

**Resistance, Solidarity, and Alternative Communities:** The novel is full of suffering, of exclusion, but it also provides a vision of resistance and hope. One of the most important findings is that there are alternative communities that are being built by marginalized people that question the power dynamic in the dominant communities. The Jannat Guest House is a symbolic place of resistance, where the people marginalized in society, establish a place of belonging. This community is a community of acceptance, diversity and support as opposed to exclusion as practiced by state institutions. Discuss with Roy that opposition can be in the form of organized political action. Normal everyday practices of survival, remembrance, solidarity and care can also have an impactful challenge to oppression. The other characters in the novel are marginalized and don't go away no matter how much they are silenced and ignored. Roy's general political perspective is reflected in this focus on a communal

resilience. Despite the overwhelming nature of state power, individuals and communities have the potential to create other futures that are based upon justice and inclusivity.

Implications of the Study: The results show that not only is *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* a literary text, but it is an important political intervention as well. Roy shows the interconnections of exclusion, state violence and a crisis of democracy and places a focus on the potential of resistance to be a change agent. It tells a novel that helps to inform current debates on human rights, citizenship, protection of minorities and democratic accountability. It is not a specific native phenomenon; it has a relevance to a wider discussion about nationalism and social justice, identity politics, social change etc.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this study politics of exclusion in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* has been explored based on the interrelated issues of State power, minority identity and democratic crisis. The analysis shows that Roy is concerned with exclusion as a process of structure and politics that is integral to the social institutions of today. The novel demonstrates the way the dominant power systems control the notion of belonging, while pushing those who don't fit the norm of citizenship and nationhood to the margins by means of its characters – transgender, Muslims, Dalits and Kashmiris. The results reveal that the state power is realized in an evident and subtle way within the novel. All of these—militarization, surveillance, institutional discrimination, ideology—contribute to the maintenance of exclusionary structures. Roy's stand for Kashmir is a very strong statement against the use of violence, and extraordinary powers, on the part of democratic states in the name of national security. The novel thus questions traditional notions of democracy, sovereignty and legitimacy. In addition, the novel in this study is found to be a novel of an ongoing negotiation and contestation of minority identities. As opposed to fixed identity, Roy describes this as fluid, dynamic and politically constructed. The marginalized characters' experiences reveal the failure of the dominant concepts, based upon narrow cultural, religious and gendered norms that define citizenship. The other significant thing that the novel adds is a criticism on the democratic institutions. Roy contends that democracy can't be gauged by elections and the constitution. The conditions of a genuine democracy are social inclusion, equality of recognition and respect for human dignity. Especially depriving the vulnerable therefore is a deep fault in democracy and not just a social issue. The novel also provides a fascinating glimpse of the possibilities of resistance. Roy also envisions other forms of

solidarity in alternative communities, like the Jannat Guest House. These places are a response to exclusionary structures, offering opportunities for living together, caring for each other and empowerment together. Resistance is also found in the lives of the people who practice it, in their acts of survival, memory and building community, and in their political activism. Finally, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a bold critique of the current frameworks of exclusion and domination that are integral to literature. To foreground the voices of the marginalized and reveal the paradoxes of democratic governance, Roy broadens the scope for political fiction as a medium for a social critique and ethical engagement. The novel is very relevant in today's context of rising nationalism, identity crisis and uncertainty in the democratic system. It has continued to be important for its emphasis on ending any meaningful democratic process without keeping justice, equality, and human dignity as its focal point.

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