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Banishing The Dichotomy Of Gender Identity: A Study of Arundhati Roy's Ministry Of  
Utmost Happiness

Abstract

Time has proved that the term gender is never ubiquitous. Gender or sex is malleable and has sundry dimensions. The term gender , now has space to accommodate the LGBT sections along with the heterosexuals. This paper analysis the novel “The Ministry of Utmost

Happiness” which hinge on Queer theory. The aim of our analysis is to demonstrate how queer theory not only influences, but also expands the spectrum of gender identity to make rethink about how we approach the so called concept gender. Through this paper we also endeavour to banish the age old conviction ‘Gender dichotomy’.

Key words: Gender, LGBT, Heterosexual, Queer theory, Gender dichotomy.

Literature being a reflection of the society encapsulates the emotions, feelings and experiences of mankind. It helps in expanding our horizons, building our intuition and instincts. It enhances the faculty of critical thinking whereby one commences to cultivating a better sense of detail, hence sanctioning one to discern multiple interpretations within a single sentence. No other form of learning brings the enrichment that reading brings to its readers. Literature engenders a way for people to record their thoughts and emotions in a way that is accessible to others. This enables the reader to relive those experiences.

Good literature is deemed to be timeless. Where the themes of the story and the messages conveyed by the story are paramount, no matter what era or place the reader subsists in. It should have the ability to engage the reader with its subjects and characters;

written in voice, or voices, that we find interesting, sympathetic, and compelling. It should instill the element of delight, curiosity, amusement in the mind of the readers. It should make one think and feel; enriching the readers with fresh conceptions and thoughts which would widen one’s vision of life.

Literature indeed plays a significant role in our life. As such, literature represents a living body of work that acts as a mouthpiece to humans of all ages, providing a better understanding of the human condition in cognition to the ever-shifting morals of the society. Hence the literature of a society reveals the popular notions of the society along with its transmuting convictions. In the modern age when the man has become virtually a prisoner of

Science and has been reduced to a machine, it is the love of literature that makes his life more endearing and exuberant.

Queer theory engages a vast domain of different critical and cultural contexts deriving its influences from feminism, poststructuralist theory, radical movements of people of colour, the gay and lesbian movements etc. Queer theory was a term coined by Teresa de Lauretis at a conference in 1990 (Giffney, 2011).

.As the term took its birth through a homosexual movement most studies in this theory, focus on transgression with sexual norms, structures and identities.

In the educational sphere, the use of this term began with gender and sexuality studies. The theory being mainstreamed into society in the year 1990 whereupon it had made its duty to boldly challenge the notion of defined and finite identity categories. It has throughout its course tried to break the binary societal norm of good versus bad sexualities; exploring the root cause of the development and creation of such societal norms. It had also successfully put forward the idea of no set normality in sexuality; only changing norms. It had taken upon its stride to fight inequality and destroy differences based on gender where it strongly tries to alter the set world view that heterosexuality is the preferred sexual orientation. Key theorists who were the harbingers and propagators of these ideas were Michael Foucault, Gayle Rubin, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler and so on. Many of these theorists used deconstructionist criticism to identify issues of sexual identity. They also tried to establish the idea that non-heteronormativity is natural and set forth its goal to change the monolithic thoughts of society. The theory slowly grew into an umbrella term for the sexual minority establishing sexuality as something that crosses boundaries; failing to fall within categories providing for many a far more promising identity rather than gay and lesbian.

Literature concerning with this theory explores how the term sexuality is forced into only two categories such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, normal/abnormal. When

in reality it exists in itself in a much wider spectrum, consisting of diverse things. Where the first category enjoys privilege, power and centrality, the second is sidelined, derogated and subordinated. Later

theorists such as Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler introduced the idea of the normativity of heterosexuality being based on the suppression and denial of same-sex desires and relationships. So, as of queer theory it deals with much more than just defining the term 'sex'; instead it goes to the heart of a person's identity, encouraging everyone to ask ourselves the very question who we are, where it also teaches the human kind to look at every other literary genre with a new set of critical eyes. 'Epistemology of the Closet', published by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in 1990 is a major work dealing with the same theme. It effectively worked as an attempt of explaining the queer theory briefly; giving an insight into how the theory would emerge and function for the minority group of sexuality and gender in the society. Other works related to the queer theory are Jennifer Finney Boylan's 'She Not There', Susan Kuklin's 'Beyond Magenta'.

Suzanna Arundhati Roy is an Indian author and activist, famous for her Man Booker Prize-winning novel *God of Small Things*. It is a semi-autobiographical novel which projects the writer's own life through the character Ammu. She drew criticism for her writings about the movie *Bandit Queen*, which exploited the criminal Phoolan Devi. After 20 years, in 2017; she came up with another fiction *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. She is very outspoken in her spirits and her advocacy for human rights led her to the winning of many awards such as Lannan Cultural Freedom Award (2002), The Sydney Place Prize (2004), and SahityaAcademyAward (2008).

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* anatomizes the life in India with its realistic glimpses of the bloody partition. The locale of the novel is the chaotic and lively streets of Delhi. The plot deals with savage prevalence's from Indian modern history such as the

evolving fights in Kashmir. It also explores the cultural conflicts of modern Indian society along with its diverse groups of characters. The research is an attempt to understand the issues faced by the hermaphrodites in the society and how a new perspective can help them lead a better life

The novel opens with the story of Aftab, a hermaphrodite, who has been raised as a boy and later transforms his identity as transgender women through surgery. Thus Aftab becomes Anjum. Anjum then finds a residing place called Khwabgah. There she becomes a mother figure to a girl named Zainab and raises her. Soon after the twisting incident of Ahmadabad massacre, Anjum moves out of Khwabgah to a local cemetery. Later on, she transforms that place to a guest house named Jannet or Paradise.

As the story progresses, Anjum finds a baby from an observatory in Delhi but somehow the child disappears one day from her custody. She then decided to track the house of the woman who took the baby from her. Soon there is a shift in the narrative. The story then focuses on the life of the woman who took the baby. We can see a flashback of Tilo's college days, about two men who loved her. One an old bureaucrat named Garson Hobart and another journalist named Naga, whom she marries afterwards.

During her college days, Tilo shared an on and off affair with an architecture student Musa Yeswi. Musa is an activist and a freedom fighter who is involved in the Kashmir separatist movement. He along with his friend Gulrez got arrested by a major named Amrik Singh for their revolutionary activities. During their attempt to escape, Gulrez is killed in front of Tilo's eyes. After this Tilo marries Naga and their 14 years of unsuccessful marriage ends up in a divorce.

Tilo moves to a new apartment after her separation from Naga. After this incident she disappears with the baby she got from the observatory and this is the point where Anjum comes after her and the child. Anjum invites them to move to Jannat house and to live with

her. Tilo later names the baby as Miss Jabeen the second in the memory of Musa's daughter who got killed in 1990s Kashmir conflict along with her mother.

Roy again mixes up the plot by adding further details about Tilo and her abortion. Again the narrative got shifted to Zainab's wedding and she is married to a man named Saddam. Later Tilo receives a letter from the baby's mother and she explains in the letter the story of how she got raped and why she abandoned the baby. In the end, they rename the baby as Udaya Jabeen to honour both the parent's wishes. Musa again comes back and reunites with Tilo. But soon he returns to the Kashmir fights and got killed in the revolt. The novel ends in harmony as Anjum is finally able to live a life as she wanted. The narrator closes the novel with Anjum's peaceful walk around the streets of Delhi with Miss Udaya Jabeen.

The novel attempts to portray the sufferings of transgenders through the character Anjum. Transgenders face inequality from almost every sphere that they might have come across. This happens solely due to the lack of understanding of the public. To bravely establish one's identity as a transgender is a challenging task. Most transgenders across the globe suffer from poverty, harassment, unemployment, homelessness, violence etc. Many of them can't even afford the basic living necessities due to this unequal treatment and injustice done to them. They are forced to indulge in drug sales and sex work for survival and lack legal protection from the government. Apart from all these torments, they suffer from alienation as well as an identity crisis.

In the story, Arundhati Roy portrayed the influence of the dark side of the multicultural society upon the life of a transgender named Anjum. The narrator depicts a society where transgender is marginalized and treated as a shame. Being born on the wrong body made Anjum leave her family and home forever. Her new identity gave her a new family but she lost her place in the society. Negligence and damage that she faced from her life turned her character to that of a stoic. Through this magnificent story, Arundhati Roy

manages to portray the pain and sufferings that moulded a hijra like Anjum to survive amidst all the chaos. Even after being mistreated as an outcast she manages to raise a 3-year-old girl child named Zainab.

Once Anjum became a permanent resident of Khwabagh, she learned that holy souls like her were different but the world of Khwabagh was just as complicated as or more complicated than the Duniya. As every other ordinary person, she too had ambitions. “She wanted to be a mother, to wake up in her own home, dress Zainab in a school uniform and send her off to school with her books and tiffin box.” The question was, were ambitions such as these, on the part of someone like herself, reasonable or unreasonable.

Arundhati Roy adhering to her reputation of being a prolific writer has effectively portrayed the character of Anjum and her struggles. Although the novel is not moulded into a coherent whole, the author manages to transgress the emotions of the character to her audience with much ease. Arundhati Roy, with much vividness, embarks the journey of Anjum from her childhood as a boy to her maturation as an adult. Where from being a boy who was confused about her identity, Anjum transforms into a person who is ready to stand against the world to preserve her own identity. Throughout the novel, we can see two conflicting voices inside Anjum.

“the riot is inside us .the war is inside us, Indo-Pak is inside us. it will never settle down .it can’t”.(page 23)

The cause of these conflicts is not her disillusion with her identity. Rather it’s the result of lack of acceptance of her queerness by others; where even her own family is not able to accept the path she chooses, that is her life in the Khwabgah. Anjum is born as a hermaphrodite, not technically a hijra where she has both the boy parts and girl parts; even her own mother is taken aback from this.

“all things, not just living things but all things –carpet, clothes, books pens, and

musical instruments had a gender. Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman. everything except my baby”. (page 8)

But as the plot progresses we can see how Anjum from a clueless boy eventually learns to embrace her uniqueness. She makes it a point to live life the way she wants it to be even when the brooding eyes of the society perpetually tormented her; breaking away from the constraints put afore her by society. She even learns to find friendship from the limited social circle that accepts her identity

“I’m all of them, I’m Romi and Juli, I’m Laila and Majnu. And Munja, why not? Who says my name is Anjum, I’m Anjuman. I’m mehfil, I’m a gathering”. (page 4)

Even when her friend makes a comment that god created hijra as a creature that is incapable of love, she refrains from accepting it. But the words seemed to be a prophecy of her future struggles where even though she transforms into a woman with ease; her physical attributes always stood as a constraint in her being a woman. Her coarse voice and facial hair irritate her; even her body begins to rebel against her wishes - she grows hairy, tall, muscular and she develops Adam's apple. A strong sense of unhappiness is developed in her due to her inability to align with her internal sense of identity with her outer one.

The trapping of sex into two divisions as female and male made her confused about her identity.

“ He or She. He’s a HE and a She. She-He, He-She Hee! Hee! Hee!” (Page 12)

Although in the beginning, she wanted to become a woman, eventually she realizes she can never become one as per the standards of the society. Questions regarding her identity and existence started tormenting her. The fact that she could never fit into the normal society hurt her deeply. In spite of all this, she becomes Delhi's most famous hijra. She even mothers a daughter named Zainab who immediately trusts her which suddenly subdues her internal battle of Indo- Pak, as dubbed by her friend. Although the entry of the little girl in her

life made it all cheerful and lively: it existed only for a short period of time. Her getting caught up in the Gujarat riots alters her personality altogether which frightens even Zainab afraid to be around her. In the end, all she is gifted with is loneliness. But she doesn't kneel down to the adversities in her life instead with a strong heart sets out to live alone in the abandoned cemetery. This can be seen as a quest of her journey towards self-realization. As we see that she slowly grows comfortable in her own body and starts to accept her differences; even though people still despise her. Although in the beginning, she lived alone; by the end of the novel, she is met with a large company of people who love and care for her. Over the years her home gets bigger and bigger until it becomes a guesthouse that she rents out to travellers.

The novel, as well as the study, tries to portray how miserable the life of a transgender can be or is. Here the author is not just pointing to a specific section. Instead, she is trying to portray the struggles of a much broader section of the society who are marginalized and sidelined for the only reason being that they don't adhere to the set societal norms. Here they are met with abandonment and disrespect. "The plot's kaleidoscopic view and rugged Rushdie maximalism make it open to the readers a world that is beautiful and brutally ugly at the same time; the chaos mirroring India's identity itself."

Identity can be seen as the heart of the ministry of utmost happiness. It does not mean just a national identity, but also identities of individual people, often those considered marginalized. The novel is an anthem for misfits and the weirdo's watching on the sidelines or being crushed by oppressive forces. In the novel as well as in life, identity is an incredibly slippery element and this very incredible nature of identity is what Arundhati Roy tries to explore in her book. The duality of Anjum's identity, being a man and a woman at the same time or a hijra at times restricts her happiness. This confused identity develops into a prison in her life. The author confers to her readers that even hijra's or the queer are human beings that share

the same emotions and feelings as anyone among us. Marginalizing or sidelining them based on their problematic identity is like punishing them for a reason they are not part of. Instead of keeping them away, the society should be able to understand their emotional trauma and embrace them so that they can overcome the issues of this problematical identity. The author throughout the portrayal of Anjum speaks of the uniqueness of each human being and the importance of cherishing this uniqueness instead of mechanically succumbing to a model developed by the society.

The protagonist in the novel Anjum is perceived as queer and as someone whose identity is not welcomed by the society. One of the many goals of queer theory is to engender platform and sentiments in people to accept such individuals; instead of isolating them and labelling them as queer. Queer theory preaches it as the obligation of each one of us to help those individuals to emerge into the mainstream society. Giving them equal status as any other individual, we should embrace them along with their queerness. Then only they will have a chance to express their concerns and establish their individuality. Anjum struggles to procure acceptance from others. This shows the hostile nature of the society to such individuals. Even Anjum's own family forsakes her which shows the profundity of this evil.

Transgender across the globe encounter a lot of violence, abuse and discrimination. The trauma they suffer stems from the so-called cemented notion of the gender binary that is the classification of gender into two opposite forms, the male and female. It is done as per the social system or cultural belief. The violence and the inequality faced by the transgender is an exigent issue with dire consequences. Various countries have come up with their own federal laws to solve the discrimination faced by the LGBT sections.

In North Carolina, same-sex sexual activity is legal and the state has also recognized same-sex marriage since Oct 10, 2014. They passed the hb2 bill on 23 March 2016 for the protection against discrimination based on sexual or gender orientation. On Sept 6, the

supreme court of India decriminalized homosexuality by declaring section 377 of the Indian penal code unconstitutional.

In order to solve the problems faced by the LGBT section, the government has to take certain compulsory and comprehensive measures other than the creation of fundamental laws to protect them. Proper sex education class needs to be made mandatory in school level itself to clear all the confusing aspects of gender orientation. In many countries, transgender is forced to use toilets as per their sex at the time of their birth. The government should take necessary steps to construct proper restrooms which are accessible to them and should also make sure that, the laws passed for their protection should grant them the liberty of speech and expression, and to represent themselves in the legislative assembly of the country. Proper education facility needs to be given to the LGBT section along with the so-called normal section and thereby providing them with equal treatment. More job opportunities should be given to them both in private and government institution. Proper health care treatment needs to be provided to them. As there are laws to protect women from sexual abuse, there should be laws to protect transgender women too from sexual harassment

The society is fearful about letting go of a truth it has previously believed in. It feels destabilizing to let go of gender norms. More than any set of agendas, a change in the mindset of the people is needed to solve the problems faced by the LGBT. One has to accept the fact that, like male and female transgender are also another gender category. The way people have been taught is deeply rooted in the mindset of society. Like every other citizen of the country, they are also human beings with flesh and blood. So as to solve all the problems, this false notion of considering LGBT section as a third wheel, need to be uprooted from the society.

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