

## Political Landscapes and Social Crossroads: A Study of 'The Ministry of Utmost Happiness' by Arundhati Roy

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### ABSTRACT

*The current study explores the complicated portrayal of socio-political conditions in post-partition India and the contested region of Kashmir in Arundhati Roy's novel. The analysis extends to the thematic exploration and representation of transgender identity within the complex Indian society and politics. The present study aims to answer two key questions: How does Arundhati Roy depict the socio-political conditions in post-partition India and Kashmir? What is the significance and impact of the representation of transgender identity in Indian society and politics within the novel? Employing a qualitative methodology, the study draws on expository, evaluative, and systematic approaches, utilizing both primary sources from the novel and secondary sources from scholarly articles. The theoretical framework is rooted in queer theory, emphasizing the uncertainty of identity categories and challenging binary distinctions, providing a comprehensive understanding of the socio-political landscape and transgender experiences in "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness."*

**KEYWORDS:** Arundhati Roy, post-partition India, Kashmir conflict, transgender identity, queer theory

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy, born on November 24, 1961, in Shillong, India, is a well-known Indian writer and activist. Growing up mainly in Kerala, her life took an unconventional turn at the age of 16 when she adopted a bohemian lifestyle, supporting herself by selling empty beer bottles. Moving to Delhi for education, she crossed paths with Pradip Krishen, a filmmaker whom she later married. This marked her entry into the film industry, where she made significant contributions to scripts, earning recognition like the 'National Film Award' for best screenplay for her work in "In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones" (1989).

Arundhati Roy, as a passionately enthusiastic writer, is distinguished for strengthening the voices of the voiceless in her works, notably becoming the first Indian woman to clinch the Man Booker Prize for her debut novel, "The God of Small Things," in 1997. In her autobiographical

masterpiece, she critiques societal interference in individual lives, weaving historical events and politics into the narrative to underscore socio-political disruptions in India, with a keen focus on the degradation of women's rights and the dilemma of the marginalized. Fearlessly portraying the harsh realities of the world, Roy, in both her fictional and non-fictional works, fearlessly addresses societal brutality and criminal issues, actively contributing to societal and political change to create a better world for the oppressed. Her commitment to this cause is exemplified by her declaration that fiction, for her, is a means of presenting her world to those she deeply cares for, fostering understanding and empathy (Sambahangphe; Sarker and Rahman 139-142; Butalia).

Moreover, she made her contribution in a book *We Are One: A Celebration of Tribal People* in 2009 that portrayed different cultures around the world highlighting their diversity. She assumed the job of an agent representative in every last bit of her works.

She is also labeled with the title of peace activist. In her essay *The End of Imagination* (1998), she criticizes the government of India for using nuclear weapons ruthlessly. Roy writes:

*There can be nothing more humiliating for a writer of fiction to have to do than restate a case that has, over the years, already been made by other people in other parts of the world, and made knowledgeably. But I am prepared to grovel...because, in the circumstances silence would be indefensible ( Roy 5).*

This essay shows that how passionately Roy wants to create peace and harmony in her country. She strongly condemns violence and nuclear explosion in India. She fears that these nuclear weapons will destroy human health as well as wealth of the nation. Roy sheds light on the aftermath results of this catastrophic explosion in these words "*What shall we do then, those of us who are still alive? Burned and blind..., carrying the cancerous carcasses of our children...Where shall we go? What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we breathe?*" (Roy 6).

"*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*," published in 2017, stands as Arundhati Roy's second novel, marking a significant literary piece of literature following her acclaimed debut with "*The God of Small Things*" in 1997. Roy, an accomplished Indian writer and social activist, brings her distinct narrative style to demonstrate the complex socio-political condition of post-partition India. In this novel, she extends her literary piece to illuminate the contested region of Kashmir, exploring the sophisticated situation of human lives within political disorder. A departure from conventional storytelling, Roy's work links multiple narratives and characters, offering a perspective on the diverse struggles and identities in the Indian subcontinent. As she explored the lives of marginalized communities, particularly the transgender population, the novel becomes a heartbreaking exploration of societal norms, political disorders, and the quest for identity in the face of hardship. "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*" is a literary odyssey that transcends traditional boundaries, inviting readers to anticipate the profound intersections of love, resilience, and the human experience in a difficult situation.

This study employs a qualitative approach, aiming to analyze information through both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources involve passages from the main text, while secondary sources include scholarly articles and critical research papers. The focus of this study is on Arundhati Roy's second novel, "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*" (2017). This novel explores the socio-political conditions of post-partition India and sheds light on the political

confusion in Kashmir. The current study specifically examines the challenges faced by the transgender community, exploring societal attitudes and the political landscape, and aims to clarify the concept of transgender identity within the intersections of society and politics, referencing queer theory.

This study applied queer theory to explore and understand the dilemma of transgendered individuals as well as transgendered society and politics and to explore that how does gender act as performative construction of society and politics. Queer theory contradicts the idea of the two unbending binaries of male and female gender. According to Queer theorists gender is constructed by this society. Gender is what one performs in the society with its regular and successive practices. Through the lens of this theory, it is considered that gender is not expressive but performative. Queer theory questions that reality which is defined by the society. It examines socio-cultural constraints of gender and how the oppressed ones are being marginalized by this suppression of gender and power, Piantato (2016).

### 1.1.RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the portrayal of socio-political conditions in post-partition India and the contested region of Kashmir in Arundhati Roy's novel
- To evaluate the representation and thematic exploration of transgender identity in Indian society and politics

### 1.2.RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does Arundhati Roy depict the socio-political conditions of post-partition India and the contested region of Kashmir in her novel "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*"?
2. What is the significance and impact of the representation of transgender identity in Indian society and politics within Arundhati Roy's novel "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*"?

### 1.3.THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study lies in its exploration of Arundhati Roy's novel "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*" (2017), which contributes to our understanding of complex socio-political dynamics in post-partition India and the contested region of Kashmir. By analyzing Roy's portrayal, the study aims to shed light on the narratives surrounding historical events and political chaos, offering insights into the human experience within these contexts. Furthermore, the examination of transgender identity in the novel adds significance by contributing to the broader discourse on marginalized communities in Indian society. Understanding how Roy addresses these themes not only enriches literary scholarship but also offers valuable perspectives on societal norms, political challenges, and the diverse facets of identity, fostering a deeper comprehension of contemporary Indian literature and social issues.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The novel "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*" reflects Arundhati Roy's distinct "political philosophy" that resonates throughout the text. The narrative predominantly addresses political subjects such as the Manipur nationalist movement, the displacement of adivasi tribal communities, Maoist insurgency within Central Indian forests, the (2002) Gujarat Massacre, and the ongoing Kashmir conflict. (Batra, 2017) shares insights about the novel's nature, characterizing it as "undeniably a political novel." He expands on this, noting that the novel is intertwined with political figures and that its core is driven by prevailing "political issues that set much of the action in motion."

(Sushree, 2018) a research scholar in an international research journal of English Literature critically analyses Arundhati Roy's socio-political concerns in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). She researches that in her novel, she has written about all the hidden and humiliating truths of society and politics including the worst conditions of transgender, minorities, political systems and massacres in Kashmir. She bravely writes about the vices of Indian society as well as injustices of political systems in the country.

(Sehgal, 2017) in "Arundhati Roy's fascinating mess" describes the novel as a "companion piece" to Roy's political writings. Through perceptive portrayals of notable Indian politicians like "The Poet Prime Minister" (Atal Bihari Vajpayee), the "trapped rabbit" (Manmohan Singh), the "Gandhian" (Anna Hazare), "Mr. Aggarval" (Arvind Kejriwal), and "Gujarat ka lalla" (Narendra Modi), Roy masterfully demonstrates the twisting of the narrative with the political realm and the theatricality of Indian politics over the past three decades.

(Khan, 2017) argued in his essay titled "The Truth Has a Habit to Prevail" that the narrative and terminology employed in Arundhati Roy's novel *"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness"* is inherently more non-fictional than fictional. The author contends that many names and incidents within the novel are rooted in actual people and events. For instance, Aggarval is seen as a representation of Arvind Kejriwal, the Prime Minister of New Delhi. The character Jalib Qadri is identified with the real-life lawyer Adv. Jalil Qadri, while Major Amrik Singh's portrayal directly mirrors that of the historical figure Major Avtar Singh, known for his ruthless actions in the Indian Army against Kashmiri freedom seekers and civilians. Much like Russell's London or Jean-Paul Sartre's Paris, Jantar Mantar, a location in Delhi, serves as a protest site. Roy, akin to Dickens portraying the French Revolution in "A Tale of Two Cities," uses her novel to narrate sad stories of human rights violations and the marginalized state of India. Instead of presenting an American dream, Roy unfolds a depiction of the hidden reality within Indian society beneath layers of nationalism, radicalism, extremism, hindutva, and the notion of a "rising India."

(Nithya, 2017) a research scholar while examining the novel as a whole justifies the precision and sharpness of Roy's art of narration that in the end of the novel "we look like vessels full to the brim, story after story, about love, violence, war, brutality, honesty, conceit, politics, human relations...[it] questions about life and death. Each tale is connected to the next by the sheer narrative skills of Roy" (John 76). Additionally she contemplates and provokes the idea that "whether you can call it a novel about transgender issue or a political satire or a historical fiction is a question which is hard to answer. The canvas is so vast that almost everything has come in, bit by bit..." (John 76).

(Neha, 2017) in her research article 'Arundhati Roy Has Reinvented the Social Novel', critically evaluates the shallowness of democracy as well as hollow promises of Indian government. She takes risks for all those people who are on the peripheries of society. She is threatened to be labeled as 'a traitor' (Sharma) for her barbarous argumentation in her works. She writes her second fictional novel after the long span of twenty years in which she "cements her long running disapproval of Indian policy, particularly in Kashmir..." (Sharma).

Another critic, (Ali, 2011) records a critique on Arundhati Roy's 'mission to inspire' in her second novel. He registers her passion to rail against the fractured Hindu Nationalism in India which "has made her a target of the Indian government" (Kazmi). The literature on physical and social borderlands encompasses a diverse range of scholarly works that explore the complexities and significance of boundaries, both tangible and intangible, in various contexts. The concept of

physical borderlands often refers to geographical or territorial boundaries, while social borderlands pertain to the spaces where different social, cultural, or identity groups intersect. Scholars such as (Gloria Anzaldúa, 1987) in her seminal work "Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza," delve into the experience of living in the borderlands, where multiple cultural influences meet and often clash. Anzaldúa's exploration of the U.S.-Mexico border provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities that arise in such liminal spaces.

The literature also extends to the examination of political borderlands, where issues of power, governance, and contested territories come to the forefront. In Arundhati Roy's novel "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*," the author skillfully navigates the physical and social borderlands of post-Partition India and the troubled region of Kashmir, offering a nuanced portrayal of the complexities inherent in these contested spaces. Moreover, the study of physical and social borderlands often intersects with discussions on identity, migration, and displacement. Works by scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha (2004) in "The Location of Culture," contribute to understanding how individuals negotiate their identities within the complex tapestry of borderland experiences. These discussions become particularly relevant in the contemporary global context, where issues of migration and cultural hybridity are prevalent.

The literature on physical and social borderlands provides a rich and multidimensional exploration of the spaces where geographical, cultural, and identity boundaries intersect. It encompasses works that not only analyze the challenges and conflicts within these borderlands but also celebrate the potential for cultural exchange, resilience, and transformation in these liminal spaces. The examination of Arundhati Roy's novel within this framework contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics inherent in physical and social borderlands.

### 2.1.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the present study the theoretical framework draws upon queer theory, which originated in the 1990s and was influenced by scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa (1990) referencing Michel Foucault's work. This framework becomes appropriate as the research aims to explain the concept of transgender identity in the context of societal and political borderlands. Queer theory's emphasis on challenging binary distinctions and recognizing the fluidity within identity categories aligns with the study's exploration of transgender experiences in the novel. Additionally, the critique of minoritizing epistemology within queer theory resonates with the analysis of power dynamics and societal norms presented in Arundhati Roy's work, contributing to the understanding of the socio-political landscape depicted in "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*."

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology that includes expository, evaluative, and systematic approaches for analyzing specific information. The qualitative approach involves utilizing and interpreting both primary and secondary sources, with primary sources drawn from passages in the main text, and secondary sources comprising various scholarly articles and critical research papers. The primary objective of this research is to clarify the concept of transgender identity as it evolves on the borderlands of society and politics, specifically examining the role of physical transgender embodiment within the framework of queer theory. The main source of reference is the novel under examination, "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*."



*Happiness*" (2017), while secondary sources include various works by the author and analyses provided by different critics on Arundhati Roy's body of work.

#### 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1. Physical and Social Borderlands

In Arundhati Roy's novel *"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness"* (2017), the narrative challenges the societal norms and gender binaries that classify everything into strict male and female categories. *"The riot is inside us. The war is inside us. Indo-Pak is inside us. It will never settle down. It can't"* (Roy 23). The novel explores the concept of the third gender, the 'transgender,' produced by the combination of the traditional male and female genders, challenging societal acceptance worldwide. Roy, an Indian social activist, dedicates her novel to "The Unconsoled," expressing deep compassion for those who feel marginalized. The healing journey depicted in the novel begins with Aftab's revelation to his mother that he identifies as neither a boy nor a girl. Children of his age tease him and make fun of him by saying:

*"He's a She. He's not a He or a She. He's a He and a She. She-He, He-She. Hee! Hee! Hee!"* (Roy 11).

Aftab's mother struggles to accept this truth, grappling with the confusion of her child's unconventional gender identity. *"He wanted to put out a hand with painted nails and a wrist full of bangels...He wanted to lift his salwar just a little as he stepped over a puddle just enough to show off his silver anklets."* (Roy 19) Roy portrays the internal conflict of Jahanara Begum, Aftab's mother, as she seeks solace in Sufi shrines to cope with the unexpected and unconventional reality of her child. The novel serves as a poignant exploration of the challenges faced by the transgender community, offering a narrative that extends compassion and understanding to those often marginalized and misunderstood.

Aftab's parents attempt various methods to conform their child to traditional gender norms, consulting doctors and even a surgeon to address Aftab's perceived hijra tendencies. Despite these efforts, Aftab's natural inclinations towards a transgender identity persist, revealing a complex understanding of gender that transcends physical attributes. The hijra community conceptualizes themselves as born men but women inside, emphasizing a dual identity that goes beyond the physical. Aftab's parents, facing societal prejudice, send him to music classes where he becomes the target of ridicule and mockery. Society, often unaccepting of transgenders, perpetuates discrimination and disrespect. Eventually, Aftab embraces his true self, transitioning to Anjum at Khwabgah, a space symbolizing dreams and acceptance. Khwabgah becomes a preserve for those with transgender souls, reflecting the broader social transformation into a realm of transgender existence. This narrative in Arundhati Roy's *"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness"* intertwines personal and societal struggles, shedding light on the intricate dimensions of transgender realities.

In Khwabgah, a shelter for those marginalized by society, the diverse experiences of transgender individuals unfold. Bismillah, a woman driven out of her home due to childlessness, seeks refuge here, highlighting societal pressures on women related to fertility. Razia, living in the disguise of a woman while identifying as a man, challenges gender norms, reflecting the complex dynamics of societal expectations. Nimmo Gorakhpuri, a hijra aspiring to Western fashions, grapples with societal limitations, expressing despair over the perceived experiment of God in creating hijras. *"It was an experiment. He decided to create something, a living creature that is incapable of happiness. So, he made us...Who is happy here?"* (Roy 23). Anjum, facing physical changes due to hijra tendencies, embraces the hijra community's traditions, finding

solace in Khwabgah after being abandoned by her family. Ustad Kulsoom Bi, the guru of hijras, counters shame with pride, celebrating their identity as 'Holy Spirits' trapped in bodies. She acclaims: *"There was no reason to be ashamed of anything...because Hijras were chosen people, beloved of the Almighty."* (Roy 27). Medical interventions fail to change the reality of hijras, emphasizing the societal exploitation of their vulnerability. Through Anjum's journey, Arundhati Roy illuminates how the transgender reality permeates society, exposing the mistreatment and deprivation faced by this marginalized community. The hunger for love and acceptance remains insatiable, underscoring the societal challenges that transgender individuals endure.

In *"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness"* (2017), Anjum grapples with the desire for motherhood, forming an emotional bond with Zainab, a child she rescues. The transgender community faces societal prejudice, being derogatorily labeled as faggots, queers, hijras, or kinnars. *"In her imagination, it had the fullness, the sense of entirety, of one of the two"* (Roy 30). Anjum, fearing societal humiliation, travels to Ahmedabad with Zakir Mian to visit a holy shrine, only to witness the brutal communal violence targeting Muslims. The societal hatred in Gujarat compels Anjum to adopt Hindu practices for survival, chanting the Hindu-Gayatri Mantra. She says: *'it's safer like this... 'Gujarat could come to Delhi any day. We'll call him Mahdi'* (Roy 48). The disturbance of Gujarat deeply affects Anjum, leading her to leave Khwabgah, the transgender shelter. She moves to a graveyard, finding solace amidst the dead, symbolizing the societal rejection of the transgender community. *"This place where live, where we have made our home, is the place of falling people. Here there is no haqeeqat. Arre, even we aren't real. We don't really exist"* (Roy 84). Anjum constructs a makeshift home, violating societal norms, as the graveyard becomes her refuge and a place of predictable sorrow. In defiance of municipal rules, Anjum justifies her dwelling, considering it authorized by a higher power. This transition reflects the struggle of the third gender in a society rigidly divided into male and female binaries, exposing the challenges faced by the transgender community in seeking acceptance and a space to call home.

In *"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness,"* Anjum's unconventional residence in the graveyard serves as a rebellious space that challenges societal norms. The Jannat Guest House, established within the graveyard, becomes a refuge not only for the transgender community but also for conventional society's rejected individuals. *"The clear criterion was that Jannat funeral services would only bury those whom the graveyards and imams of the Dunya has rejected"* (Roy 80). Anjum challenges traditional practices by transforming her home into a funeral store, burying those spurned by mainstream graveyards and challenging discriminatory gender categorizations. The narrative, through characters like Saddam Hussain, sheds light on societal exploitation, both in life and after death, exposing a caste-ridden system and broader social inequities. He has been exploited by everyone and eventually he concludes that the whole society is categorized into three types of people *"...security guards, people who need security guards, and thieves"* (Roy 74). Anjum's enduring desire for motherhood resonates as a universal human longing, transcending societal constraints and reinforcing the novel's exploration of love, family, and acceptance beyond gender norms. In Anjum, the thirst of becoming a mother does not quench and she longs for it throughout her life. She always keeps her belief in the dream of becoming a mother. At one place, in her discussion with Saddam Hussain she says: *"I was born to be a mother...One day Allah Mian will give me my own child..."* (Roy 83).

The narrative captures the complexities of Indian society through the lens of transgender experiences and societal discriminations. Anjum's heartbreaking struggle to adopt an abandoned

baby girl reveals the deeply embedded prejudices against the hijra community. The confrontation with Mr. Aggarwal highlights the immense inequality between genders, where Anjum's yearning for motherhood clashes with societal norms. *"He, who believed he was always right. She, who knew she was all wrong, always wrong...He, who wanted a law. She, who wanted a baby"* (Roy 122). The child who is helpless, for whom there is no place to go, to live but it is not acceptable for the society that a transgender may adopt her. Instead of looking after the child, the whole society is indulged in restricting Anjum to approach her. It casts light on the transgender aspect of the society itself. And suddenly the child disappears as Tilo kidnaps her. Tilo's subsequent kidnapping of the child underscores the societal rejection of unconventional family structures. The novel further examines the paradoxes of India's rapid modernization, contrasting magnificence with the terrible dilemma of the impoverished. Dr. Azad Bhatiya's hunger strike illuminates the basic inequalities, symbolized by the preferential treatment of U.S. President's dogs over destitute citizens. These narrative threads collectively depict a society in instability, struggling with a transgender reality that challenges established norms and exposes systemic injustice.

In *"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness,"* societal hierarchies based on gender, religion, class, and other classifications create a challenging environment for the transgender community. Anjum's struggle with societal norms regarding her child Aftab, who identifies as a 'hijra,' vividly illustrates the rejection and discrimination faced by those outside binary gender norms. The novel explores the cultural rigidity that forces individuals into predetermined gender norms, leading to alienation and confinement within transgender communities. Queer theory, as applied in the analysis, challenges fixed and stable identity categories, emphasizing that gender and sexuality are not inherent or predetermined but constructed by societal norms. According to Queer theory, the sexuality or gender identity of any person is not solid and permanent and it might convert into any other form at any stage in the life of an individual as *"Queer theory begins from the notion that identities are not destiny; our identities do not determine who we are, who we become, or how we view the world"* (Calafell and Nakayama, 2016. 1). This theory critiques the oppressive nature of gender classifications and asserts that gender identity is performative, subject to change through repeated acts over time. Judith Butler's perspective emphasizes that the essence of the body is not natural but rather gendered, defined by its performed acts. The novel underscores the societal challenges faced by the transgender community, providing a lens through which to explore the complexities of identity and discrimination in Indian society. One of the gender theorists Judith Butler beholds the idea that:

*If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversion repetition of that style (Butler 520).*

In her essay on Performative Acts and Gender Constitution, Judith Butler contends that gender is not a stable identity but rather somewhat constituted entity shaped over time through stylized repetitions of acts. This perspective is applicable to Anjum's actions in the novel, where, as a transgender individual, she challenges patriarchal norms by struggling to become a mother. Butler's concept of gender as performative is evident in Anjum's adoption of Zainab and her subsequent fight against societal norms to adopt Miss Jabeen. Anjum's performative



construction, breaking free from rigid gender binaries, reflects Butler's idea that gender is not expressive but performative. Queer theory aligns with the notion that individuals face marginalization due to societal standards. Anjum's disobedience of gender norms challenges the perception of her as abnormal, emphasizing that her behavior defines her identity. Anjum's performative acts, including creating her own space in a graveyard, parallel the society's performative construction, displaying different behaviors and a clash between societal norms and natural expectations. This analysis illustrates how queer theory challenges fixed identities and addresses the oppression faced by marginalized groups based on various societal hierarchies.

#### 4.2. Political Borderlands

Arundhati Roy's emotional verse, *"Bullets you sow instead of love/Our homeland you wash with blood/You imagine you're showing the way/But I believe you've gone astray"* (Roy 221), reflects her dual role as an internationally acclaimed social and political activist. In her novel *"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness"* (2017), she magnifies her voice against various societal and political injustices dominant in India and Kashmir. Roy's narrative probes the issues such as dispossession, marginalization, oppression, prejudices, enslavement, mounting poverty, and brutalism. Through a diverse cast of characters, she articulates her concern for the instabilities within Indian politics, emphasizing the dilemma of minorities, the subjugated, and the subalterns. Anita Felicelli describes the novel as *"an anthem for the misfits and the weirdos watching on the sidelines or being crushed by oppressive forces."* Roy skillfully directs the socio-political borderlands, documenting personal sufferings and shedding light on the harsh political realities in India and Kashmir after the Indo-Pak partition. The narrative unravels the impact of partition on marginalized communities, particularly Muslims, and critiques the dark side of Hindu Nationalism, exploring themes of brutal treatment in Gujarat riots and the politicization of every aspect of Indian life. Iyer acclaims: *"The novel explores the process of marginalization of populations and reframes the discussion beyond the politics of Pakistan"* (Iyer 166). The novel harshly portrays the disillusionment with politicians and the government's unfulfilled promises, revealing a society where, as Roy suggests, *"it's safer to be a cow than a woman or Muslim."*

The recent selection of a new Prime Minister has placed him on the mighty throne, yet concerns arise as the government, fueled by opportunism, appears more interested in pursuing illegal and unfair side businesses than addressing the nation's needs. The political leaders seem indifferent to implementing reforms, preferring to spread hatred among the youth, keeping them occupied with internal conflicts and unaware of their legal rights. In her novel *"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness"* (2017), Arundhati Roy strongly speaks against injustices, including the Gujarat riots and the Kashmir conflict, portraying a complex global scenario where minorities and neglected communities endure devastating violence. Roy's exploration of the political history of Kashmir through characters like Musa exposes the unresolved issues of the disputed land, haunted by violence and a lack of resolution since the Indo-Pak partition. The narrative encapsulates the fraudulent politics in Kashmir, where innocent Kashmiris become victims of the ongoing struggle between India and Pakistan, as described by Tariq Ali and highlighted by Roy's sympathy and anger. *"Only graveyard breezes blow in the valley of Kashmir. Murder tours the region in different guises, garbed sometimes in the uniform of Indian army or in the bearded men, armed and infiltrated by Pakistan, speaking the language of jihad-Allah..."* (Ali 12). He further elaborates the conditions of these Kashmiris in these words:

*"Depressed and exhausted by the decades of violence, many Kashmiris have become passive: the beauties of spring and summer pass unnoticed by listless eyes (12)."*

The novel further addresses the mistreatment of minorities, paralleling the trouble of transgender and other marginalized groups in Indian society. Roy, as a political activist, uses her artistic storytelling to expose hidden political issues and criticize the chaotic state of Indian politics, where deceit, torture, suffering, and fakery abound, especially in the tumultuous landscape of Kashmir. She admits:

*I spoke about justice for the people who live under one of the most brutal military occupations in the world; for Kashmiri Pandits who live out the tragedy of having been driven out of their homeland; for Dalit soldiers killed in Kashmir whose graves I visited on garbage heaps in their villages...for the Indian poor who pay the price of this occupation in material ways and who are now learning to live in terror of what is becoming a police state (Chamberlain)*

The novel sheds light on the paradoxical reality faced by the Kashmiri people, caught between death, disappearance, familial love, and the struggle for democracy against a backdrop of misinformation perpetuated by news channels. The “three variables in their cases are Death, Disappearance and Familial Love” (Roy 300). Despite the growing Jihadi and resistance movements, the Indian government's approach to Kashmir remains a source of ongoing tension and conflict.

#### 4.2.1. Social Marginalization and Political Disorder in Kashmir

The innocent Kashmiris bear the effect of terrorism in the name of freedom (Azadi). Widespread brutality, injuries, and imprisonments based on suspicions plague the region, with Indian soldiers arresting Pakistani Muslims, dubbing them terrorists and denying them human rights. The mothers of the disappeared sons tell their shattered stories to different people at different places. They weep publically and pass through the terror and fear every time. On the banners it is written as:

*The story of Kashmir*

*DEAD=68,000*

*DISAPPEARED=10,000*

*Is this Democracy or Demon Crazy? (Roy 115)*

The irony of the time is that the news channels are not pointing out what is written on the banners. They are only telecasting the helplessness of these people and hiding the facts and reasons behind it. In Kashmir, there are running Jihadi movements against the violation of their rights. Apart of these, there are also rapidly growing resistance movements against the Indian army and government.

The Indian army, under the guise of securing survival and freedom, employs deceptive campaigns, as noted by critics examining the constant presence of sectarian violence in Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness." In the struggle for autonomy, freedom fighters in Kashmir find themselves competing with the powerful Indian political forces, resulting in internal strife and frustration. Simultaneously, Indian soldiers subject captured militants to severe physical and mental torture, manipulating them to conform to a narrative that suits their agenda. The novel portrays the cruel deception of the Special Task Force (STF) soldiers, who fabricate encounters to frame innocent Kashmiris as terrorists. “*Their officer asked us to sign a paper. If we hadn't signed they would have killed us. We signed as witness to an encounter in which the STF had tracked down and killed a dreaded Afghan terrorist...It was in*

*the news*” (Roy 193). The political anarchy in Kashmir, as depicted in the novel, reflects a thin line between crime and innocence, with political chaos manipulated by those in power.

The suffering Kashmiris face not only physical torment but also a distorted political reality that denies them their rights and perpetuates violence. The Indian government's treatment of Kashmiris, treating them as mere snacks for entertainment, is exposed through various characters and situations. The narrative explores the oppressive campaigns used against freedom fighters, the duplicity of Kashmiri politics, and the indifference of those in power, as evidenced by the cruelty of investigator Amrit Singh who investigates Musa. Musa reflects and describes the clever mindedness of Amrit Singh. Musa thinks:

*You have no understanding of the depths of Kashmiri duplicity...*

*Duplicity is the only weapon we have.*

*You don't know how radiantly we smile when our hearts are broken.*

*How ferociously we can turn on those we love while we graciously embrace those whom we despise. You have no idea how warmly*

*we can welcome you when all we really want is for you to go away (Roy 335-336).*

Due to Kashmir's political disturbance, the strained relationship between India and Pakistan exacerbates the conflict, leading to widespread killings, school closures, and economic setbacks. The novel intensely captures the atmosphere of fear, violence, and vengeance that defines Kashmir, where human lives have become expendable casualties of a relentless power struggle. *“Jis Kashmir ko khoon se seencha, woh Kashmir hmara hai! The Kashmir we have irrigated with our blood, that Kashmir is ours!”* (Roy 174).

The vicious cycle of attacks, revenge, and perpetual violence has transformed the once-vibrant region into a slaughterhouse, leaving Kashmiris in a state of constant fear and helplessness. Human rights violations, including injuries, deaths, and blindness caused by pellets, remain unaddressed, as activists who speak out against the brutality are systematically silenced and eliminated by the Indian government. The tragic fate of Jalib Qadri, a human rights activist, exemplifies the dangers faced by those who challenge the non-dangerous brutalization in Kashmir. *“A few days later Jalib Qadri's body showed up in a sack floating down the Jhelum. It was in a terrible condition-skull smashed in; even eyes gouged out, and so on”* (Roy 175). Despite widespread reporting of the atrocities, the international community remains largely indifferent to the plight of the Kashmiri people.

#### **4.2.2. The role of powerful countries in Kashmir**

The powerful countries, particularly India and Pakistan, are causing extensive environmental degradation in Kashmir in their pursuit of territorial control. The region witnesses the disappearance of whole forests due to the influx of diesel, alcohol, bullets, grenades, army rations, razor wire, and timber. *“There was also diesel, alcohol, bullets, grenades, army rations, razors wire and timber. Whole forests were disappearing”* (Roy 170). The democratic disguise of modern India reveals a dark underbelly as it inflicts bloodshed upon the Kashmiris who refuse to conform to non-Islamic values, treating them merely as subjects to serve political agendas. Deprived of normality, Kashmiris face a lack of conventional marriages and celebrations of cultural and religious ceremonies. While the Indian government blames Pakistan for violence, both nations contribute to the separatist movement, perpetuating bloodshed. The Indian military's response to protesters supporting the separatist cause involves labeling them as Muslim terrorists, resulting in deadly attacks, civilian deaths, and funerals, perpetuating a cycle of violence with no resolution in sight. The conflict between India and Pakistan transforms

Kashmiris into victims caught between opposing forces due to their Muslim identity and opposition to Indian rule. Despite the tragedy, Kashmir becomes a symbol of dispossession, disease, food shortage, displacement, and extreme poverty on a global scale.

In 2006, in her conversation with P.G. Rasool, at one place she confesses: For a writer,  
*it's (Kashmir) really a place which gives you an understanding of power,  
powerlessness, brutality, bravery and the dilemmas of the human  
condition. I would not want to write a book 'about' Kashmir,  
I hope Kashmir will be in all the books I write (qtd.in Sreenivasan 118).*

Arundhati Roy, deeply concerned about the political disorder in Kashmir, sees it as an exploration of power, powerlessness, brutality, bravery, and the complexities of the human condition. In her novel "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*," Roy uses socio-physical transgender disruptions to illustrate larger political transgender operations, championing the rights of the marginalized and oppressed. Roy's writings, inherently political, challenge readers to confront painful realities and give a voice to the voiceless. Through her characters, she exposes the fragility of Indian democracy, revealing how the government denies constitutional protection to marginalized sections in the country:

*If you pay attention to many of the struggles taking place in  
India, people are demanding no more than their constitutional  
rights. But the Government of India no longer feels it needs to  
abide by the Indian Constitution, which is supposed to be the  
legal and moral framework on which our democracy rests. As  
constitutions go, it is an enlightened document, but its  
enlightenment is not used to protect people.( qtd.in Sreenivasan 117)*

Roy grapples with various transgender political conditions, including terrorism, insurgency, imperialism, dam construction, and extreme poverty. In her essay "The End of Imagination," she questions the trustworthiness of politicians with nuclear capabilities.

*Who the hell has conducted those opinion polls? Who  
The hell is the Prime Minister to decide whose finger  
Will be on the nuclear button that could turn everything  
We love-our earth, our skies, our mountains, our Plains,  
our rivers, our cities and villages- to ash in an instant?  
Who the hell is he to reassure us that there will be no  
accidents? How does he know? Why should we trust  
him? (qtd.in Azhar).*

The novel also exposes the corrupt and exploitative nature of politicians, engaging in illegal affairs and misuse of power, exemplified by the abandonment of a baby girl in Kashmir, believed to be the offspring of a politician's former lover.

Corrupt politicians exploit the money meant for the poor and victimized, adding to their miseries. Despite efforts by revolutionaries like Dr. Azad Bhartiya and Devi Singh to bring about change, their struggles often go unnoticed. The corrupt political system uses transgender individuals for their benefit, neglecting their dilemma and treating them as invisible. The Indian government's agreements with the US are criticized, as the global issue of Kashmir becomes a security in geopolitical games, ignoring the suffering of the Kashmiri people. The luxurious lifestyles of politicians contrast sharply with the impoverished conditions of the common people. The environmental devastation caused by the Indian army in Kashmir, including deforestation

for weapons and furniture, transforms the region's beauty into a blood-soaked landscape. The political insurgency in Kashmir, marked by suicide bombings and relentless violence, shows no signs of resolution. Death encompasses every aspect of life in Kashmir, from daily activities to celebrations and relationships.

*"These days in Kashmir, you can be killed for surviving" (Roy 268).*

Graveyards outnumber residential areas, and grave digging becomes a dominant occupation. Musa expresses the deep mourning and hopelessness pervasive in Kashmir, where problems seem impossible. The people's cries for freedom and slogans of "Azadi" are met with continuous violence from the Indian army. The loss of loved ones, destruction of homes, and occupation of every aspect of life by the military create an environment of perpetual grief and despair. The cycle of violence and resistance continues, with no resolution in sight.

*"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness"* vividly portrays Jantar Mantar as a heartbreaking symbol of resistance and survival for the marginalized. This inclusive space in the graveyard, Jannat Guest House, blurs boundaries between various identities, offering refuge to hijras, men, and women, young, old, and displaced individuals.

*"brinjals, beans, chillies, tomatoes and several kinds of gourds, all of which despite the smoke and fumes from the heavy traffic on the roads that a butted the graveyard, attracted several varieties of butterflies" (Roy 399).*

The novel exposes the harsh realities faced by the marginalized, emphasizing the lack of basic necessities and medical facilities. Tilo's arrival at Jannat Guest House signifies a transition to a place of fulfillment, challenging societal norms and political discrimination. The celebration in the graveyard, welcoming people from all walks of life, underlines the rejection of imposed categories. The novel concludes with a sense of hope and transformation, as Jannat Guest House transforms into a symbol of rebirth, promoting a vegetable garden despite challenges, resounding broader aspirations for a better future in the transgender political borderlands of India and Kashmir. Moreover, there are binaries which represent the contrasting elements within the political and social landscapes depicted in the novel, emphasizing the complexity and conflicts inherent in the characters' experiences and the broader societal context.

**Table 1**

**4.2.3. The binaries of political and social landscapes from the novel *"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness"*:**

Political Landscapes	Social Crossroads
India vs. Kashmir	Gender Norms vs. Transgender Identities
Democracy vs. Authoritarianism	Caste Hierarchies vs. Equality
Nationalism vs. Regionalism	Urban vs. Rural Divide
Military Occupation vs. Freedom Struggle	Rich vs. Poor Disparities
Secularism vs. Religious Extremism	Political Activism vs. Suppression



Political Landscapes	Social Crossroads
Global Capitalism vs. Local Livelihoods	Traditionalism vs. Modernity
Power Structures vs. Marginalization	Injustice vs. Human Rights

Note. Table Self-created

"*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*" by Arundhati Roy straightforwardly explores the binaries of political landscapes and social crossroads. The novel reveals the difficult relationship between India and Kashmir, portraying the political tensions and conflicts that define their dynamic. Within this political landscape, the characters find themselves at social crossroads, grappling with the consequences of democracy versus authoritarianism, nationalism versus regionalism, military occupation versus freedom struggle, secularism versus religious extremism, global capitalism versus local livelihoods, and power structures versus marginalization. Roy's narrative weaves these binaries seamlessly, offering a profound exploration of the complexities within the intertwined realms of politics and society, where characters negotiate identity, resistance, and the quest for justice against the backdrop of a politically charged and socially diverse landscape.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Arundhati Roy's "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*" stands as a significant exploration of persistent colonial and post-colonial issues through the lens of gender politics in contemporary India. Through the resilient character of Anjum, a trans woman, Roy exposes the harsh realities of a society that rigidly enforces gender binaries, depicting the struggle for identity and the creation of an alternate world for comfort zone. The novel addresses the trouble of marginalized masses, victimized by societal cruelty and political disorders, especially in Kashmir. Jantar Mantar and Jannat Guest House emerge as symbols of collective resistance, challenging societal norms and providing shelter without discrimination. Roy's aphoristic style effectively captures the isolated social and political borderlands of India and Kashmir, shedding light on crucial socio-political issues. The novel, bridging from transgender existence to broader societal concerns, serves as a heartbreaking portrayal of contemporary India's complexities and conflicts.

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