

# The theme of Discrimination and transgender Identity in Arundhati Roy's the Ministry of Utmost Happiness

---

**Raibhole Pradip Marotirao**, M.A.M.Phil.B.Ed SET (English), S. R. T. M University, Nanded  
Address: At post prefill nagar Bhokar ,Dist: Nanded, Tq Bhokar.

---

Received Date 05/12/22, Revised Date 15/01/23, Accepted Date 20/01/23, Published Date 25/01/23

---

**Abstract:** This research paper is a sincere attempt to gauge the discrimination prevalent in Indian society as described in Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, published in 2017. Having different historical contexts, this novel is a reflection of various types of discrimination prevalent in Indian society, such as transgender discrimination that is based on gender identity, women discrimination that is based on male domination, Dalit discrimination based on the caste system, Muslim minority discrimination based on religious prejudice and national identity crisis based on multi-ethnic alienation that leads to the issue of identity crisis in the dislocated and disoriented people. The author has used a glut of historical events to represent the theme of an identity crisis. The victims of discrimination have a personality disorder and feel alienated because they are incapable of synchronizing with the biased society.

**References:** Discrimination, Transgender, Identity Crisis, Dalit, Dislocated, Disoriented, Multi-Ethnic.

“I am talking about millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkys.” (Ce'saire 7)

Since time immemorial, our society has been cleaved into the powerless and the powerful. The powerless people are bulldozed by the domination and servility of the powerful class and become the victims of paranoia. They have no identity and existence in society. They suffer from a lack of identity or live with a mutilated identity. They are the wretched creatures on earth having no past, and they are the victims of an inferiority complex and are always afraid of being humiliated. This research paper is aimed at studying various forms of discrimination practiced in Indian society those further lead to an Identity crisis which is "the common dynamic pattern of a group of severe disturbances.... revealed itself later to be a pathological aggravation, an undue prolongation of, or a regression to, a normative crisis 'belonging' to a particular stage of individual development. (Erikson19)

This research paper discusses transgender discrimination and identity crisis, the roots of which lie in the issue of gender identity. Gender identity is a person's identity caused by the degree of feminine or masculine traits in a person conforming to the stereotypical definition of a male or female expounded by society. The gender identity of a person is a psychological aspect of a person reflecting his/her sexual

orientation. In the article, *Let Us to Live: Social Exclusion of Hijra Community*, Sib Sankar Mal (2015) has defined the word Hijra or transgender "as an umbrella term to signify individuals who defy rigid, binary gender constructions and who express or present a breaking and blurring of culturally prevalent stereotypically gender roles." (109)

The hijras do not harmonize with the stereotypes of society. Hence, they are deprived of their rights as they do not fit in this gendered society. They live with female emotions imprisoned in a male body. They always face a dilemma of identity crisis in this clichéd society based on the binary relationship of male and female genders. They find no place for themselves and are discarded by their families too. They are devoid of social, economic, and political equality in society. Living in the stigma, they always pine for their identity and a niche in this gendered society. This research paper also deals with female discrimination in Indian society.

Indian society is a dominating male society where females are the subordinates facing hardships given by male monopoly. They are the victims of gender discrimination. The plexus of patriarchal society is composed of stereotypes that favor the supremacy of males over females. Women are wretched dolls moving in alienation, having no identity. Living in the ghetto of male enslavement, they bear the trepidation endorsed by male supremacy. They are harassed and raped brutally. They are devoid of equal rights and opportunities and are the gudgeons with no identity. Time and again, women try to vocalize their pain but are quiet. This gender discrimination not only suppresses them on the social platform but also deprives them of their right to education, fitting to attain financial independence, and equal political contribution. They are segregated from the social and national mainstream, and their contribution is never rewarded. They live with the feeling of an inferiority complex and endure the agony of discrimination and identity crisis.

The present research paper also muses on dual discrimination and identity crisis.

According to International Dalit Society Network, "The word 'Dalit' meaning 'broken' or 'ground down,' is used by 'outcaste' people themselves to describe at the same time their oppression, their identity and their collective power for emancipation." (IDSN 3) Dalits are a section of Indian society that is looked down upon and mistreated by people belonging to other castes who consider themselves above them (Dalits). Dalits are also called untouchables. Indian constitution terms them as 'Schedule Castes.' People from scheduled castes are deprived of social, political, and economic equality. They are not allowed to sit together and share food with people belonging to high castes. They cannot carry boys or girls from the so-called high castes. They are forced to perform duties like human scavenging, which is considered very low and degraded in our society. Dalits become the victims of subjection and violence at the hands of high-class society. They give up and succumb to the atrocities of the majority group. They are beaten, lynched, and killed brutally. The untouchables are not allowed to enter spiritual places or Hindu temples. At the workplace, they are not paid equally. They are denied basic amenities of life. They bear the brunt of servility and discrimination in a society governed by a high-class majority. They have no existence in the rigid Indian social system and become the victims of an Identity crisis.

Muslim minority group discrimination and identity crisis are also at the heart of this research paper. This religious minority group is victimized and humiliated by the majority groups. Though the constitution provides the right to equality, life and liberty, freedom of expression, and the dignity of life and labor to all its citizens, Muslims, being a religious minority, face vilification, and calumny. They are forced to live in a suffocating environment. They fall prey to the communal violence sponsored and sheltered by the ruling majority for social and political gains. Minority Rights Group International (2017) rightly said: "Communal violence further intensifies the marginalization of those affected, who frequently face high levels of insecurity alongside inadequate access to

justice and reparations, often with particularly challenging implications for women. Religious minorities have long been the target of various forms of persecution, such as hate crimes, threats, attacks on places of worship, and forced conversion." (MRGI 3)

Democracy should always adopt the principle of 'Majority Rule and Minority Rights,' but the pity of the modern scenario is that Muslims being minorities, are targeted and suppressed. They do not feel secure in our society. They feel like minions have no existence in the country; they are called citizens of India. The issue of the national identity crisis has also been reflected upon in this research paper. Ernest Renan (1992) says: One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present consent, the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received.... The nation, like the individual, is the outcome of a long past of efforts, sacrifices, and devotions. (10) Indian people in some parts of the country face a national identity crisis. Though people have citizenship and the constitution provides them equal rights and freedom, people still feel as if they are living on alien land. They have not been able to synchronize with the multi-ethnic society. Hence, they demand freedom and separation from their land. They are in a conundrum as they do not feel like belonging to India. This identity rage results in rebellion and defiance.

It portrays some violent and significant incidents in Indian history. There are a variety of characters in the novel's plot, which presents various violent incidents like the Kashmir Unrest, the Godhra train attack, the Ahmedabad riots, the transgender dilemma, and the predicament of a female in a male-dominated society that is divided based on caste. Aftab is reborn as Anjum and starts living the life chosen herself in the Khwabgah. She sets her emotional instincts free and remains in the Khwabgah for thirty years. One day, she finds a baby girl who is abandoned or lost. Anjum takes her to Khwabgah and names her Zeenab. After some time, she encounters a massacre in Gujrat that is the outcome of the Godhra train attack. She gets

a traumatic shock from this incident and decides to leave Khwabgah. She takes refuge in a local cemetery, transforms it into a guest house, and names it 'Jannat Guest House'. She also starts funeral services for poor, isolated, and subjugated people.

Then the novel's story shifts toward a baby found at an observatory in Delhi. Anjum takes the child. She receives a letter from the child's mother, who has written that she cannot look after the child, so she leaves the child there. After some time, the baby disappears. Anjum searches for the baby everywhere and then finds the baby at the home of a lady named S. Tilotamma. She was a strong, short, intelligent, dark-skinned, and self-dependent woman. She was a student of Architecture at the university in Delhi. During her college days, two men loved her very much. Naga, who later became a mainstream journalist, and Biplab Dasgupta, popularly called 'Garson Hobart,' who later became a bureaucrat. There was one more boy, Musa Yeswi, a boy from Kashmir. Tilo was very close to Musa.

After University, Musa goes back to Kashmir and gets married. Tilo and Musa reconnect with each other after some time. Tilo learns that Police in Jammu and Kashmir have killed Musa's wife, Arifa, and daughter Jebeen. He has joined the Kashmir separatist movement, demanding independence and separation of Kashmir from India. Later, Tilo marries Naga to play safe, but they divorce fourteen years later. Tilo then rents an apartment from Garson Hobart. After some time, Tilo takes the baby from the observatory in Delhi and names that baby Miss Jebeen the Second, after the name of Musa's daughter whom the Police in Kashmir killed. The novel's story depicts the Kashmir unrest and dilemma of the Kashmiri people.

Later, Tilo moves to Jannat's guest house along with the baby Jebeen the Second. One day they receive a letter from Jebeen the Second's birth mother, Comrade Masse Revathy. In the letter, she reveals that she was raped and so she could not bring up the child. She named the child Udaya. Hence, Anjum and others name the child Udaya Jebeen. At the novel's end, Musa, a

member of the Kashmir Liberation movement, meets Garson Hobart and talks to him about the unrest prevailing in Kashmir. He says this unrest will cause chaos and destruction in the country. He also meets Tilo at Jannat's guest house but leaves to get back to his mission of Kashmir Liberation and gets killed later on. In the last scene, Anjum and Miss Udaya Jebeen go for a walk in Delhi. Anjum satisfies her motherly instincts by looking after her and that little innocent soul is getting exposure to the outside world.

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a remarkable narrative depicting various types of discrimination prevailing at different levels and the predicament of people suffering from an Identity crisis. Arundhati Roy has reflected upon transgender discrimination and identity crisis with the help of her protagonist, Anjum, who is transgender. In a society of binary sex relations, a transgender person finds no place for herself. Anjum was born as Aftab in a Muslim family in Delhi. Her family raised her as a boy, but when her father learns that she is transgender (Hijra), he breaks all relationships with her (Anjum). Her mother, of course, loves her a lot, but she is in a dilemma. Apparently, in a gendered society, where every word and object has been categorized as male or female, her child has no gender-based identity. She thinks: "In Urdu, the only language she knew, all things, not just living things but all things- carpets, clothes, books, pens, musical instruments- had a gender. Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman. Yes, of course, she knew there was a word for those like him- Hijra. Two words, actually, Hijra and Kinnar. However, two words do not make a language. (Roy 8)

When Aftab is reborn as Anjum, she leaves her family to live a life of her choice. She enters Khwabgah, a place where eight Hijras live together. This Khwabgah is the house of dreams of all these transgender people- Bulbul, Razia, Heera, Baby, Nimmo Gorakhpuri, Mary, Gudiya, and their Ustad Kulsoom Bi. Now Anjum has also joined them. However, one day Nimmo and Anjum discuss the difference between the lives

of ordinary people who are either men or women and the lives of transgender people who are none. Nimmo says: "No one is happy here. It is not possible. Arre yaar, think about it; what are the things you normal people get unhappy about? .... Price rise, children's school admissions, husband's beatings, wives' cheatings, Hindu-Muslim riots, Indo-Pak War.... However, the price rise, school admissions, beating husbands, and cheating wives are all inside us. The riot is inside us. The war is inside us. Indo-Pak is inside us. It will never settle down. It cannot." (Roy 23) These words portray her frustration of not being a normal one. Being a Hijra means a non-entity. One day, Kulsoom Bi, the Ustad of all the Hijras, recollects her life spent under the patronage of the Mughal Empire. She expresses the significance of having an identity in society saying. A chuckle, after all, could become a foothold in the sheer wall of the future." (Roy 51)

Thus, Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a masterpiece illustrating the pain and torment of the life of a transgender person. Women's discrimination and identity crisis has also been represented in this novel. Arundhati Roy's character S. Tilottama, a short, dark-skinned woman, represents the issue of women's discrimination and identity crisis. She is a woman who "did not seem to have a past, a family, a community, a people or even a home." (Roy 155). Her mother was a high-caste South Indian woman. She had a love affair with an untouchable (Periyah), and then Tilo was born. Her mother first abandoned her. She spent her childhood in a Christian child home. After some time, her mother returned and adopted her. According to other people, Tilo is a mystery. Nobody knows about her family or past. She fights with the whole society alone. During their college days, two men loved her. One was Biplab, and the other was Naga. Both did not know about her family. Biplab says: "Tilo was like a paper boat on a boisterous sea. She was alone. Even the poor in our country, brutalized as they were, had families. How would she survive? How long would it be before her boat went down? (Roy 160)

Arundhati Roy has also presented the plight of the character Comrade Masse Revathy. She was once raped brutally by her party members. She gave birth to a baby girl but had to abandon the child at an observatory in Delhi. These incidents clearly explain the status of women in Indian society. They are not safe and secure. They do not enjoy equal rights and positions in society. They are tortured, harassed, and humiliated. They live with a broken and mutilated identity. They exist nowhere in this male-dominating society. They are treated as enslaved people to gratify the desires of men in Indian society, which is a society of monopoly of men. They are the fallen angels bearing the yoke of male domination and sycophancy. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness also explores the Dalit discrimination and identity crisis. Roy's character Saddam Hussain is untouchable. He has worked in a mortuary. He tells about Hindu doctors' discrimination and prejudiced behavior towards the untouchables at the hospital. He says:

"The Hindu doctors who were required to conduct post mortems thought of themselves as upper caste and would not touch dead bodies of untouchables for fear of being polluted. The men who handled the cadavers and performed the post-mortems were employed as cleaners and belonged to a cast of sleepers and leather workers who used to be called Chamars. The doctors like most Hindus looked down on them and considered them to be Untouchable." (Roy 72-73)

The untouchables are mistreated in India. They are broken people. They are consigned to the lowest Jobs. The Dalit women are raped, murdered, and forced to become prostitutes. They are the meek, poor creatures stigmatized by the upper caste regimes facing distress and disorientation in search of their place in society. India is a huge democratic country where many minorities live. Muslims are a minority group having different customs, rituals, festivals, and cultures. The Hindu majority in India discriminates against Muslim minorities. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is a replica of the

twinge and spasm of Muslims. Arundhati Roy's character Saddam Hussain explains how it is dangerous to be a Muslim in India. Saddam used to work as a security guard for a Delhi-based company. However, he had to work there with Hindu identity."Saddam told Sangeeta madam that his name was Daya Chand (because every idiot knew that in the prevailing climate, a security guard with a Muslim name would have been considered a contradiction in terms)." (Roy 75)

He recalls an incident when he and his father went to pick up the dead body of a cow at a village. His father was beaten to death because of the doubt of allegedly killing a cow by a mob of some Hindu extremists only because they are Muslims. He unfolds his pain while talking to Anjum about his past and says: "I have never heard a sound like that.... it was a strange high sound, it was not human... Everybody watched. Nobody stopped them... How they splashed through puddles of his father's blood like rainwater... I was part of the mob that killed my father." (Roy 89) Roy has narrated the Gujrat riots in her novel to demonstrate the plight of Muslims victimized by communal violence after the Godhra train attack in which many Hindus were burnt alive. Gujrat riots were an outcome of Godhra violence. Roy says: "The Urdu papers carried stories of young Muslim boys being killed in what the Police called 'encounters or being caught red-handed in the act of planning terrorist strikes and arrested. A new law allowed suspects to be detained without trials for months. In no time, the prisons were full of young Muslim men." (Roy 42)

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness also reveals the national identity crisis of India through Kashmir Unrest, which is a grave concern of modern society. Roy describes the Kashmir Liberation Movement when the Police brutally killed his wife and daughter based on doubt only just because of being Muslims. Musa is the replica of many other Kashmir Muslims who think they do not belong to India. They are not willing to accept themselves as Indian because they are the victims of prejudice, isolation, dislocation, violence, and ascendancy

of the government imposed on them. They raise their voice for freedom and shout slogans of 'Azadi.' Roy says: "Their problem is not confusion, not really. It is more like a terrible clarity outside the language of modern geopolitics. All the protagonists on all sides of the conflict, especially us, exploited this fault line mercilessly. It made for a perfect war that can never be won or lost, a war without end." (Roy 181)

Hence, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is brimful of many narratives that manifest the layers of discrimination embedded in Indian society in various forms at various levels. This discrimination generates the issue of an identity crisis among the victims and the discrimination. Many laws are formulated to curb discrimination based on caste, color, sex, and religion. However, those laws are not executed properly. Heinous and shameful crimes are committed due to prejudice and discrimination that further prompts the question of identity crisis of the forgotten ones."You will never stop falling.

Moreover, as you fall, you will hold on to other falling people. The sooner you understand that, the better. Where we live, where we have made our home, is the place of falling people. Here there is no haqeeqat... We are not real. We do not exist. (Roy 84)

## References

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H. (2015). *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*(Pdf). London & Newyork  
[www.decolonize.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/postcolonial\\_studies\\_reader.pdf](http://www.decolonize.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/postcolonial_studies_reader.pdf).
- Ce'saire, A., trans. J. Pinkham (1972). *Discourse on Colonialism*(pdf). New York: Monthly Review Press. Retrieved from [abahlali.org/files/Discourse\\_on\\_Colonialism.pdf](http://abahlali.org/files/Discourse_on_Colonialism.pdf)
- Erikson,E.H.(1968).3006566427\_Erik\_H\_Erikson\_Identity\_Youth\_and\_Crisis\_1\_W\_W\_Norton\_Company\_1968.pdf.Newyork:W. W.Norton.Retrievedfrom<https://ia800804.us.archive.org/5/items/300656427>
- Erik Erikson Identity Youth and Crisis\_1968.pdf.
- Denmark: International Dalit Solidarity Network. Retrieved from [www.dalits.nl/pdf/CastAnEye.pdf](http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/CastAnEye.pdf) .JM. (2017, June). Mansor, W.N., & Abdullah, A.B. (2017, January).
- Renan, E., TRANS. Rundell, E., (1992). *Microsoft word\_Ernest Renan.doc* (pdf). Paris: Presses Pocket. Retrieved from [ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What\\_is\\_a\\_Nation.pdf](http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf).
- Roy, A. (2017). *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Gurgaon, Haryana: Penguin. Print.