

REPRESENTATION OF TRANSGENDERISM IN THE 21TH CENTURY'S *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to reveal the so-called taboo theme or rejected community which tries to set up its own stand by itself. Discrimination sexually diversified people has been a dominant theme in the genre of fiction and recently this kind of theme emerges from non-fiction also. The ministry of infinite happiness, written by Arundhati Roy, narrates the traumatic story of a transgender named Anjum, who is victimized by the sex change. The society always rejects transgenderism being existed and spread even in their circumstances as the sky. They readily condemn at the being as not seen ever before. So. This novel brilliantly portrays the minority in gender base. This novel reveals many cultural issues through the character. The society does not want like her to live as her fate. It forces her to choose to dwell in the graveyard where she can find utmost happiness as the title of the novel imply.

Keywords: *transgenderism, discrimination.*

The discrimination of sexually diversified people from conventional society has been a dominant theme in fiction and non-fiction writings all over the world. It has also been even long back from the ancient period. Gender role reversals are apparently viewed with suspicion and contempt and such sexual minorities are sidelined from the convention which is fundamentally patriarchal in temperament. Those who intersect or cross such prescribed boundaries have no place in the arena of the social construct of the terms "gender". Heterosexuality is naturalized

because it is endorsed by the existing notion of power which overlooks the subversive multiplicity of sexuality.

Arundhati Roy's recent novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, published in 2017, it narrates the painful story of a transgender Anjum, who travels poor experiences due to her strange sexual identity. The community of Hijra, being a part of Indian culture, finds it difficult to cope with the mainstream heteronormative social order. The society, which upholds narrow definitions of sexual identity, hold them in contempt and they become socially isolated and discarded. The novel attempts to portray a character in the gender field. The social disgrace imparts upon Anjum to make her feel useless and denied everywhere and it rouses her to occupy a graveyard where she can keep herself distant. Later, many others follow her and the place becomes a "ministry of utmost happiness" for the downtrodden, detested minority who find themselves as misfits in a chauvinistic society. The inhabitants of the graveyard are the delegitimized people, who are not fit into the grid of the society and the novel raises resistance against the transphobic, biophobic mindset of the prejudiced society.

The tragic path of Anjum's story goes down right since her birth. She was the fourth to be born in a five children family of Mulqat Ali and Jahanara Begum. Her elder ones were girls, and, hence, the family optimistically expected a boy as the next birth. The family always wanted a boy baby and Anjum's parents wanted to name the boy Aftab, even from Anjum's mother's first pregnancy. They had been waiting for Aftab these six years and on January at night, when Anjum was about to be born, their expectations reached its height. When the midwife delivered the newborn baby boy into her arms, it was the happy one in the life of Anjum's mother. The next morning was to be the sad when she saw her baby's body in the daylight. To her dismay, the baby was born as intersex, having both sex organs incompletely placed together. She was shocked and terrified to the core. "In Urdu, the only language she knew, all things not just living things but all things-carpet, clothes, books, pen, musical instrument – had a gender. Everything was either masculine or feminine, except her baby" (8). Later, she consoles herself by thinking that there are at least two words to denote those like her baby: Hijra and Kinnar. But again she fears and realizes to live inside a language with only two words and ponders if it is possible to live outside the language. She wanted to kill the baby and then kill herself, but later decides to keep it as a secret, even from her husband. But later when she discloses the truth, that Mulaqat Ali takes him to Dr. Ghulam Nabi in New Delhi. The doctor declares Aftab a rare Hermaphrodite, with both male and female characteristics through outwardly, the male character appears to be more dominant. He recommended a surgeon to seal the girl-part and offers some medicines. But, at the same time, he told that there would be 'Hijra tendencies' which likely to

stay with the boy. His father still has hope when he says: "Tendencies are no problem. Everybody has some tendency or the other... tendencies can always be managed" (17).

It happens with most LGBT people who had a feeling of being trapped in the wrong body. Many are cured, or rather ill-treated for the supposedly wrong 'tendencies' they exhibit, which stands against the set norms. Those who conduct themselves against the set 'norms' of the society are always pitilessly stamped as 'abnormal' and are rebuffed from day to day 'normal' life and environment. Nobody would fathom their inner feelings and would judge and confirm their sexual orientation superficially. Their sexuality remains ambiguous and this queerness triggers the curiosity of others negatively. In Aftab's case through the family journeyed on a cultural project to inculcate manliness in him, he remains unmoved. In spite of all the caution and punishments, Aftab finds himself to be with girls. The girl-part had been sewed up and proved to be not just an appendage. When he grows up, he is excluded from going to school like his sisters and he spends time in the tiny balcony in his home, detached and unapproachable. He had a sweet voice and mastered all Hindustani ragas at the age of nine. But the teasing from other children in the locality became intolerable that he nearly stopped going to music classes too.

The turmoil Aftab experiences as a sexual divergent, urge him to assert himself and live according to his whims and fancies. He would often visit the place called 'Khwabgah' which means 'the house of dreams', Where Hijras live in. Eventually, he finds the place more comfortable than his own. "And so, at the age of fifteen, a few hundred yards from where his family had lived for centuries, Aftab went through an ordinary doorway into another universe" (25). He assumes the name Anjum and decides to live the rest of her life as a transwoman in which she puts her soul. Khwabgah becomes a place of dream come true. She finds freedom in the company of the lady of the household Kulsoom Bi who believed that there is nothing to be ashamed of being a Hijra. They all believed that they are some people, beloved of Almighty and have the power of blessing and cursing people. According to her, the word Hijra meant "a Body in which a Holy soul lives" (27). Anjum feels proud of her new found family and her membership in the Hijra community. She had her nose pierced and wore heavy makeup, extravagant, colorful shararas and ghararas, silver anklets and dangling earrings. She had surgery to remove her male parts and enhance her female parts. The doctor gives her pills to un-deepen her voice and develops breasts, which worked well. Eventually, Anjum becomes Delhi's most famous Hijra and she had been put in the limelight by news reporters and filmmakers. She lived in the Khwabgah for more than thirty years.

The life of Anjum seems to be a success, pinpoints many painful episodes of an identity crisis. From the moment she was born, she had been undergoing 'othering' and the society continued to be adamant in casting such gender mutants. She had lived with every female craving of the body and many times she cried aloud desperately with unsatiated sexual needs. Even when she started a new life with a patched up body, her desires and self-expressions remained unrealized. Though Anjum seems to be happy in the new found freedom among 'her own' people in the Khwabgah, the question of identity and acceptance in the society always remained a puzzle. The internal conflict and struggle they undergo are unequaled, unheard and unseen too.

It is a fact that when individuals or groups are not 'fit' into gender norms they often face stigma, discriminatory practices or social exclusion-all of which adversely affect physical and mental health. The continuous wounds cause on their psyche were not yet addressed so far, in the current Indian scene of identity politics. Fair dealing cannot be expected from a tyrannical society that has failed the minorities and outcasts. Anyway, in due course, Anjum adopts a girl child Zainab and becomes the proud mother for long until there developed a difference between them after her return from Gujarat. There is an instance in the novel when Anjum is scared of being killed only because she was a transgender at the time of Gujarat riot. She has witnessed the murder of Zakir Mian, a man of mid-seventies, who had been her father's old friend, only because he is a Muslim. People have a morbid fear of sin if they try to rape or Kill Hijras. They believed that Hijras bring bad luck and so left Anjum alive; "Un-killed, Un-hurt. Neither folded nor unfolded. She alone. So that they might be blessed with good fortune" (61). Anjum, after years of suffering and struggle, has now become emboldened, empowered and transformed persons after witnessing and experiencing the religious riot in Gujrat. She leaves Kwabgah and finds a place for herself, though it is illegally occupied, in a graveyard behind the mortuary of a government hospital. It is the burial place of many including Anjum's family for generations. She eventually builds up a guest house there and names it "Jannat" which mean "heaven". She stole electricity from the mortuary "where the corpses required round-the-clock refrigeration"(69). Slowly many abandoned occupants stay themselves, following their own rules, regulations, and hierarchies. The graveyard setting is resplendent with furniture. TV, guest rooms, vegetable garden and swimming pool are there also with a herd of animals. The alternative Duniya Anjum assembles, which upholds plurality, is contrasted with the chaotic current Indian political state of affairs, topped up with insurgencies and intolerance. The graveyard is now a symbol of hope for homeless and voice for voiceless. Though it was an encroachment, the municipal officers refrained from taking any action for fear of being cursed by a Hijra. Roy writes;

Every few months, the municipal authorities stuck a notice on Anjum's a front door that said squatters were strictly prohibited from living in the graveyard and that any unauthorized construction would be demolished within a week. She told them that she wasn't living in the graveyard, she was dying in it- and for this, she didn't need permission from the municipality because she had authorization from the Almighty Himself(67).

The society is so conditioned that it casts out these into the outer perimeter by 'othering' and segregating them. Once when a blind character Iman Sahib wondered where these transgender people are buried and who will bathe the bodies and say prayers, Anjum retorts: "Where do old birds go to die? Do they fall on us like stones from the sky? Do we stumble on their bodies in the streets? Do you not think that all-seeing almighty, the one who puts us on this earth has made proper arrangements to take us away? (5)

The novel ends with the vision of Anjum, looking at her Jannat with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction because she has made an independent democratic space for the declassed and homeless, without any margins or inequity. The optimistic note with which the novel ends on the prospect of the life of the downtrodden in India opens up a new vista of hope and acceptance to a community otherwise abominated.

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