

Patriarchal Dominance over Transgenders: A New Literary Aspect in the Indian English Writing

Ms. Shormita Bose

Research Scholar, Dept. of English, GLA University, Mathura (U.P.)

Email- bose.shormita17@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9543-2081>

***Dr. Prateek Pandey**

Asst. Prof. Dept. of English, GLA University, Mathura (U.P.)

Email- prateek.pandey@gla.ac.in

Abstract –

The paper will bring out the change in the Indian English writing genre that highlights the transgenders life struggle. This paper attempts to throw light on the pathetic condition of the transgenders in the society. Transgenders are all a subject of abuse and they form the lowest strata in the society, as they are in a state of being in ‘no man’s land’. However, this paper shows how a transgender child first had to fight a battle within their own family to gain acceptance of their gender identity. The paper deals with the journey of a transgender character Aftab in the novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, where the aforementioned character goes through the trauma of being a trans person as well as an individual who completes the task of surviving in this world. Arundhati Roy has highlighted the gender roles performed in the post-colonial society. This novel explores the cultural variation in the lives of trans people, which is explicitly political and violent. The concept of dominance of hetero-normative society and the analysis of in-between identities has been discussed in this paper. The paper attempts to underline the pathetic life of transgenders in the mainstream society. The paper highlights the patriarchal dominance in the life of Anjum (who was initially Aftab), the protagonist of the novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.

Keywords – Transgender, Hermaphrodite, Patriarchy, Postcolonial and Feminist.

Introduction –

Transgender people are neither regarded as male nor as female, they are considered as in-between human beings. Transgender is an umbrella word used for transsexuals, drag-queens, trans-man, trans-woman or cross-dressers, etc. Leslie Feinberg can be said to be one of the first to use this term transgender as a political, umbrella term. In India, they have different names in different regions of the country like *Hijra*, *Shiv-shaktis*, *Kothis*, *Aravanis*, *Jogtas*, *Kinner*, etc. The sex assigned to them from their birth does not match their gender identity or sexual orientation. But the people of the heterosexual society boycotts them, as they do not want to involve them in the mainstream society. Ultimately, these trans-people are bound to live a life away from their family and friends. Arundhati Roy in her novel *The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness* has attempted to portray the journey of a transgender woman Anjum.

Anjum born as a male- Aftab- in a conservative Muslim family of Shahjahanabad in Delhi. Her reproductive part was not fully developed, it has both male and female reproductive organ. Roy has mentioned in the novel that Aftab is a perfect example of hermaphrodite. The author writes, “Aftab was a rare example of Hermaphrodite, with both male and female characteristics.” (Roy, 16) Hermaphrodite is an organism with both male and female reproductive parts partially. Aftab differs from how stereotypical men are ought to be. His gender identity does not adhere to the stereotyped gender norms. The author has shown us the effect of marginalization on the post-colonial people. Roy is a writer and social activist; she has always raised her voice against the unjust norms and also challenges the hegemonic norms in the society. Roy ironically presents the double standards of the society in her novels, she poignantly points out the atrocities faced by the transgenders in the society. Anjum as Aftab has faced all sorts of pain and distress in her house and at the same time, she has to suffer indifference and negligence in the society. Marginalization and gender biasedness are the central themes of the novels written by Arundhati Roy. Roy became one of the most controversial writers in the post-modern era. In the novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the author brings about the position of woman and trans-woman in the Indian society. She presents before us the constant struggle of a trans-woman Anjum in the male dominated conservative structure.

Roy has always supported the deserted class, marginalized section of the society and she became the voice of the voiceless oppressed class. In 1990, Judith Butler in her work: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, presents that the gender is performative and sexual orientation of an individual is socially constructed. In the novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the character of Anjum shows how she was forced in her childhood to perform according to the gender norms. Her mother Jahanara Begum conceals the truth of her own child, being a hijra and named her as Aftab- a male child. She was shocked to discover that her child is a hermaphrodite- who has both male and female reproductive organ. The author writes, “In Urdu, the only language she knew, all things, not just living things but *all* things- carpets, clothes, pens, musical instruments- had a gender. Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman. Everything except her baby.” (Roy, 8) Meanwhile, she visited many dargahs and prayed to God to heel the girl part of her son, she even conceals this truth from her husband for a very long time. But the society is constantly bullies her for her feminine mannerisms, Aftab was a gifted singer and he was very interested in learning music. Singing and dancing, according to the society does not meant for males and, that is why children teased Aftab for her femininity. Children teased 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 (12). This led Aftab leaving his music school as he could not bear such atrocities at a very tender age.

Mental health is hardly discussed in the society and especially the mental health of a transgender children are barely discussed in the forefront. The trans-child at a very young age develops the issue of depression and trauma, they faces great challenges in their lifetime and especially in their childhood as they themselves are confused about their own gender expression. They have to deal with several issues like suicidal tendency, lack of societal

support, fear of their identity revelation, shame, mental stress and the problem of transphobia. Also, there is a fear of losing their relationships and they have to adjust in the new environment and there are self-imposed restrictions on them. Even the health carers are not fully being aware about the health issues of the sexual minorities. They have to face discrimination due to lack of information regarding social schemes, health schemes, education schemes or job opportunities.

Role of Patriarchy –

Mulaqat Ali, father of Anjum/Aftab, he was a descendent of Mongol warriors and he sought to recall the stories of great Mongol warriors to his son. Mulaqat Ali constantly tries to inculcate masculine mannerisms in his son, but it didn't make any difference to Aftab. The author narrates, "He stayed up late into the night, telling Aftab stories about their warrior ancestors and their valour on the battlefield... and how Temujin fought a whole army virtually single-handedly to get her back because he loved her so much, Aftab found himself wanting to be her." (Roy, 17) Anjum wanted to live her true gender identity. Her father was shocked when he first came to know about the reality of his son of being a hijra. Her parents took her to a sexologist, Dr. Ghulam Nabi so that he could heal the girl part of their son. The author writes, "After examining Aftab he said he was not, medically speaking, a Hijra – a female trapped in a male body – although for practical purposes that word could be used." (Roy, 16) We can trace that the role of gender is constantly dominated by the norms of the patriarchal society. The character of Aftab is considered to be the *Other* because of his in-between characteristics. Her family continuously suppressed her feminine mannerisms and colonize her body and gender expression. The author writes, "While treatment would surely help, there would be 'Hijra tendencies' that were unlikely to ever go away... 'Tendencies?' he said. 'Tendencies are no problem. Everybody has some tendency or the other . . . tendencies can always be managed.'" (Roy, 17)

The society tries to have control over the gender choice of the people; the people have to follow the prescribed norms and standard behaviour according to the gender assigned from their birth. The novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* deals with various contemporary issues and it questions the society for its gender norms. Roy put up the questions that were the people are colonised by the state or by its own cultural and societal norms? In our society, women are suppressed by the patriarchal society, but transgenders are 'doubly colonised' group of people as they are suppressed by the society as well as they do not have any gender identity. They do not have the access to education facility, job opportunity, health care services, societal acceptance, no legal rights, etc. Aftab was forced to adapt the male mannerisms within him, especially his father tries to suppressed his true identity and forced him follow the communal norms. The author narrates, "Simultaneously, he embarked on the cultural project of inculcating manliness in Aftab." (Roy, 17) Aftab/Anjum had to fight against her own family and then society for her own gender choice and sexual preference. According to the society, Anjum has no gender, she is an in-between human. Often, we observe that in the society there exists a gender hierarchy, in which only the male gender enjoys or have the privilege to enjoy power and centrality. However, in the novel *The*

Ministry of Utmost Happiness, Mulaqat Ali never accepted her child's decision of being a *hijra* for the rest of the life.

The background of the novel is set during the Indo-Pak riots which throws light on the postcolonial aspect of the novel. Postcolonial literature mainly talks about diverse cultural difference and deals with the issues of gender, class discrimination and orientation of sexuality. The themes of the novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* are mainly about gender discrimination, dominance of society and colonization of thoughts. Anjum was trapped in her own home and she feels free when she entered *Khwabgah* where she could freely express her gender identity and there she finds people of her own type. She wants to go beyond her boundaries as she tried to identify herself in the new world. According to postcolonial critics, "They develop a perspective, not just applicable to postcolonial literatures, whereby states of marginality, plurality and perceived 'Otherness' are seen as sources of energy and potential change." (Barry, 201) Anjum, the protagonist, finally felt free and she could able to dress in the clothes of her own choice when she joined the *hijra* community. People alienated her because of her dual voice, "frightened other people" (Roy, 28).

Roy as a feminist writer always raised her voice for the unjust treatment given to the females, transwoman, dalits and other marginalized group of people. In her Booker prize winning novel *The God Of Small Things*, she throws light on the pathetic condition of the people belongs from the lower strata of the society and the miserable condition of women in the society. Similarly, in her second novel she has chosen a transwoman to portray her journey within the structure of the heteronormative society. The story of the novel highlights the sufferings of women and transwoman who were denied of education facility, right to speak, right to express and right to work. They have to face discrimination in every phase of their life. Anjum, she has to face the problem of identity crisis from a very tender age. Indian society is a male-dominated society, in which men holds a superior position than women. Women is considered to be the suppressed class in the society, whereas, on the other hand transgenders are doubly suppressed class. As the identity of the people belonging to the LGBTQ community is a question mark for the society. The society has some standardised norms for maleness and femaleness and if anybody go beyond their gender expression then his/her identity is questioned by the society. As a feminist writer, Roy explains the agony, pain, sufferings of the transgender people and throws light on the fact that how Anjum has fought back against the atrocities of the world.

Conclusion –

Arundhati Roy in her work questions the society about the roles of men and women that whether they are biologically different or their social construction is different. She somehow tries to bring out change in the literary world by narrating life struggle of a transgender. She examines the representation of woman or transwoman within the society and portrays it through her work. Similarly, some queer theorists like Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler questions the standards of heteronormative norms, "by stressing the extent to which the ostensible normativity of heterosexuality is based on the suppression and denial of same-sex

desires and relationships.” (Abrams, 328) In the novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Kulsoom Bi explains the life and journey of *hijras*(transgenders) to Anjum :

“Ordinary people in the Duniya – what did they know about what it takes to live the life of a Hijra? What did they know about the rules, the discipline and the sacrifices? Who today Knew that there had been times when all of them, including she, Ustad Kulsoom Bi herself, had been driven to begging for alms at traffic lights? ... In the Khwabgah, Holy Souls trapped in the wrong bodies were liberated.” (Roy, 53)

Khwabgah is a place which accepts people belonging to different background without any sort of discrimination. This place is symbolic of freedom, secularism, and multifaith. The novel is full of allusion, irony and allegory. After colonization, the colonizers dominated the country and imposed their culture and norms on the colonized people. Similarly, in this novel also we witnessed that thoughts and mindset of the people are being trapped in the socially constructed rules and regulations. Anjum/Aftab was forced to adapt the male behaviour, her parents forcibly tried to implant manliness in her mannerisms, which clearly explains the colonization of thoughts within the construct of patriarchal dominance. Also, writings by transgender people about their experiences are particularly notable change in the Indian English writing because they realistically simulate the long-term harassment and suppression they have faced due to societal gender norms. Novels like *Me Hijra Me Laxmi, I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey*, *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, etc. are some of the autobiographies that shows the life struggle of the transgenders. Autobiographies stand out as reliable sources. Through their writings, these literary works unequivocally reveals how our society was divided into stereotypical male-female categories. The creative output and diverse forms of trans writings are undoubtedly remarkable. Such writings are an exact representation of the discrimination that the transgender community suffers due to Indian society's gender norms and laws, which have traditionally separated them from the core of gender classifications.

Work Cited –

1. Abrams, M.H. & G.G. Harphan. A Glossary of Literary Terms. Cengage Learning : Delhi, 2015.
2. Assumi, Inakali. “Postcolonialism in Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.” *Modern Research Studies*, Vol.5 Issue 2/ June 2018. Dept. Humanities & Social Sciences, NIT Agartala : 2018. Pg. 54-61.
3. Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory*. Viva Books : New Delhi, 2018.
4. Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge : New York, 1999.
5. Choudhary, Swati. “Ecofeminist study of Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.” *IJCRT*; Volume 6, Issue 2 April 2018.
6. Roy, Arundhati. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Penguin Books : Gurgaon, 2017.
7. Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. IndiaInk : India, 1997.

8. Supriya, Mandal. "A Postcolonial Overview of Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness." Postcolonial English Literature: Theory and Practice. Authorspress : 2018. Pg. 123-133.
9. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ministry_of_Utmost_Happiness