



POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS IN THE ARUNDHATI ROY'S NOVEL: *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

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ABSTRACT



The ministry of utmost happiness is only the second fictional novel that the writer has published in her time. The Novel glues together some of the worst events in the political history of modern India which covers more than four decades. It encompasses the cultural, economic, social, and political happenings of our nation. It deals with the most alienated and the marginal identities/the Hijras. It compares and contrasts the famous image of the nation as a secular and stable democracy to its dystopian nature. The Author presents an essentially anti-authoritative and egalitarian society through the saga of tales from the mouth pieces of a number of characters.

Keywords: Arundhati Roy, National Identity, Ideology, Marginalised, Subaltern.

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The book is written by Booker prize awardee that became a public/intellectual and then returned to fiction writing twenty years after the publication of her first novel. The novel is a long critique of contemporary India presenting all the horrific happenings/events which occurred in the last four decades. It deals with the political, cultural, social, economic events of contemporary era. All the major events which gave a dystopian colour to the nation have been fictionalised by a drawing characters who subtly described those events namely the partition of India, the Gujarat riots, the Delhi Blasts, Anna Hazre's Lok Pal Bill, brutal beatings of the Dalits and attitude of common people towards the marginalised/the hijra's. She in an interview with "The Hindu" says "To me this book is not a thinly veiled political essay masquerading as a novel; it is a novel" (www.thehindu.com). She bravely fights for the rights of the marginalized, the oppressed and the subaltern as we see in the character of Velutha (Dalit) in "The God of Small Things".

The writer resists the tendencies of dominating classes for their marginalising the oppressed classes in her writings. In her first essay of collection Ahimsa, she evokes the Gandhian tool of protest which strongly emphasises the nonviolent means of fighting for the rights. In "Come September" she declares that writing is no more a leisurely exercise; instead it is a conscious act of the resisting the infinite injustice of modern day human experience.

She challenges the nationalism of twentieth century which led to the genocide, the oppression of minorities and stereotyping of tribal people. The author herself gives a commentary by introducing

into the text and in stark detail gives a commentary on the period of Emergency.

Civil rights had been suspended, newspapers were censored and in the name of population control, thousands of men (mostly Muslim) were herded into camps and forcibly sterilized. A new law-The Maintenance of Internal Security Act-allowed the government to arrest anybody on a whim. The prisons were full; a small coterie of Sanjay Gandhi's acolytes had been unleashed on the general population to carry out his fiat (34).

Mara Hvistendahl, the author of the Book Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys over Girls and the Consequences of a World Full of Men says "An astonishing 6.2 million Indian men were sterilized in just a year, which was 15 times the number of people sterilized by the Nazis". Anjum and her colleague who were witness of the Emergency were beaten by the police and ordered to leave the place. The host of the party along with his three guests were arrested by the police. Thus, Roy is criticising the decision of Indhira Gandhi for the imposition of National Emergency which created a lot of trouble for the common people

THE STORY OF KASHMIR

There was an association of mothers of the disappeared, whose sons had gone missing, in their thousands, in the war for freedom in Kashmir that had made first visit to the Super Capital. They include mothers, wives, sisters and a few young children of the disappeared persons. They carried banner which displayed

*The Story of Kashmir**DEAD=68,000**DISAPPEARED =10,000**Is this Democracy or Demon Crazy?(115)*

It is here worth to mention that no press reporter bothered to look at the protesters from Kashmir. They rather had an outrage at the idea of freedom for Kashmir.

A recent event of Indian history has been represented with the help of grave yard image which acts as an omnipresent metaphor for the Kashmir situation, death is an all pervading reality in Kashmir.

... Death was everywhere. Death was everything.

Career.Desire.Dream.Poetry.Love.Youth itself. Dying became just another way of living. Graveyards sprang up in parks and meadows, by streams and rivers, in fields and forest glades. Tomb Stones grew out of the ground like young children's teeth. Every Village, every locality, had its own grave yard. (314).

Here Anjum is slowly able to transform her grave yard residence into a hostel for bohemian, revolutionaries, lovers and those abandoned by society. In the graveyard setting, the line between life and death is slurred over and erased. It indicates a complex relationship that is there between life and death in the contemporary India. Anjum tries to regain the values of life particularly love, hope, faith and life itself in the Jannat Guest house so as to administer utmost happiness to those who have been shunned by the normal world.

The narrative is now focussed on 2002 Gujarat riots, a horror which could have been easily forestalled but for the unholy political agenda of the ruling party and the indifference of the administration towards a section of the population whom they should have constitutionally protected. The official investigations done later figured out that there were few Muslim master minds behind this horror. There are references to the barbaric incidents of burning down of train coach and the site of the dispute in this novel. Roy writes that "A Senior Cabinet Minister said the burning of the train definitely looked like the work of Pakistani Terrorists". Roy probably believes that the chief minister of Gujarat at that time and his police were responsible for the incident.

BHOPAL GAS TRAGEDY

Roy also talks about the fate of the victims of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy which occurred on the night of 2nd Dec 1984 in a pesticide plant namely union carbide India limited situated in Bhopal. A highly toxic gas Methyl isocyanate got leaked which killed thousands of people in few days. At JantarMantar Roy gets a chance to meet a group of 50 protesters demanding for justice. Government has done nothing for the betterment of the victims of this tragedy as they are still seen protesting and demanding justice.

An old banner, faded from decades of use, said, Warren Anderson is a war criminal. A newer one said, Warren Anderson has killed more people than Osama bin Ladin (111).

SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS

On September 11, 2001, the world trade centre buildings were attacked by an Islamic terrorist group Al-Qaeda. It had hijacked two American domestic



flights “American Airlines Flight 11” and “United Airlines Flight 175” and smashed the world trade centre buildings. This act shocked and surprised the whole world.

The planes that flew into the tall buildings in America came as a boon to many in India too. The poet Prime Minister of the country and several of his senior ministers were members of an old organization that believed India was essentially a Hindu nation and that, just as Pakistan had declared itself an Islamic Republic, India should declare itself a Hindu one...Now, suddenly, as hostility towards Muslim grew, it began to seem to the organization that the whole world was on its side (34).

CONCLUSION

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness by Arundhati Roy takes reader on a journey of many years and talks almost of all the major incidents taking place in our country. The Novel is political novel in which the writer raises the various issues that happened in the country and showed her sympathy towards the victims of numerous incidents like National emergency, Bhopal Gas Tragedy, Lok pal Bill, September 11 Attacks and Kashmir issue.

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