

A Study on the Concept of Intersectionality in Books of Arundhati Roy

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ABSTRACT

Intersectionality allows us to understand how layered oppressive experiences exist in real people, touching gender, class, religion, and politics. This paper closely looks at Arundhati Roy's fiction and nonfiction, with a particular emphasis on her two-bestselling works: *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Roy's essays lay bare how structural inequities hit India's poor, weaving in her experiences with sharp political critique. She brings into view misogyny, caste prejudice, communal violence, and a government in overreach that keeps individuals at the margins. The approach is interdisciplinary, treading narrative voice, symbolism, and fragmented storytelling to trace resistance and the many selves. By situating personal tragedy within a political and historical context, Roy challenges power and advocates for social justice. The findings indicate Roy's work constitutes a landmark in Indian English literature; it uncovers the complex, sensitive, and politicized relationships between diverse identities and the injustices perpetrated along axes of inequality.

Keywords: *Discrimination, marginalized, intersectionality, identities, persecution.*

1. INTRODUCTION

A person's experiences of privilege and oppression can be complex and multi-faceted due to the interplay of several identities, including but not limited to gender, class, colour, religion, sexual orientation, and disability. Intersectionality reveals the interrelated and mutually reinforcing nature of social inequities, as opposed to seeing them in isolation. Women from oppressed castes face different types of discrimination than men from the same caste or women from higher castes due to the complex web of identities that these groups inhabit.

Legal and social analyses that treated gender and race separately often ignored the experiences of Black women, a point brought to light by Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 use of the term. The intricate network of connections between patriarchy, classism, caste, and community identification can be better understood in the Indian setting through the lens of intersectionality. A brief summary of what intersectionality is: it reveals how social identity is multi-faceted and how injustice cannot be explained by a single factor alone.

By illuminating the co-operation of multiple oppressive systems in Indian society, Arundhati Roy's fictional and non-fictional works present an enthralling analysis of intersectionality. In order to show that marginalization is always the result of multiple factors, her works examine how gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, and political power interact with one another.

In Arundhati's "The God of Small Things", one sees how social concepts of gender and caste intersect in the life of Ammu. Her falling in love with Velutha, who happens to belong to a different caste from hers, results in severe punishment being meted out to her due to her violation of caste conventions. While Velutha suffers persecution on the basis of his "caste, class, and political status," Ammu suffers under patriarchal authority.

Many of the characters in "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness", like the hijra Anjum, have lived through the intersection of gender nonconformity, religious persecution, and societal isolation. Topics like state brutality, nationalism, and the oppression of minorities are brought to light in the book by establishing links between personal pain and larger political realities.

Nonfiction works by Roy deepen her intersectional perspective by highlighting the disproportionate effects of military, capitalism, environmental injustice, and corporations on marginalized communities. Because of her political participation and narrative strategies, Arundhati Roy's work contributes significantly to the intersectional debate in contemporary Indian English literature by amplifying previously unheard histories and experiences.

2. THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS (1997)

Arundhati Roy, an Indian author, writes domestic fiction in her book "The God of Small Things." The "Love Laws" of 1960s Kerala in India, ruin the lives of non-identical twins and the story follows their formative years. How seemingly small events, choices, and experiences may have a profound impact on people's actions is a central theme of the book.

This work has become an essential part of postcolonial literature since it examines casteism and the aftereffects of British colonialism in India. It was the 1997 Booker Prize winning novel. The story takes place in Ayemenem, Kerala, and jumps around in time from 1969 to 1993. The identical twins Rahel and Estha reconcile in 1993. Ammu Ipe, who fled her abusive father by marrying Baba, eventually went back to Ayemenem with her children. Returning from England, Ammu's brother Chacko has finalized his divorce. They are joined by Baby Kochamma, Pappachi's sister who has remained unmarried due to her unrequited love for him. She manipulates events to orchestrate tragedies.

Chacko extends an invitation to Margaret and her daughter Sophie to spend Christmas in Ayemenem after the tragic death of Margaret's second husband in a vehicle accident. The family is driving to the airport when they are stopped by a mob of communist demonstrators who encircle the vehicle and make fun of Baby Kochamma. Velutha, an Untouchable servant at Rahel's family's pickle plant, may be among the demonstrators, according to Rahel. A snack counter sales assistant named the "Orangedrink Lemondrink Man" sexually abused Estha later on in the movie. Baby Kochamma blames Rahel for her shame because he says he saw Velutha with the Communist mob. A forbidden relationship begins as Ammu is attracted to Velutha and Rahel and Estha form a bond with him.

Tragic circumstances stemming from Velutha's caste and his love with Ammu belie his sympathetic portrayal. Ammu goes to jail and Velutha is exiled after their affair is revealed by Velutha's father. The twins and their cousin Sophie run away from Ammu because she holds them responsible for her situation. Sophie drowns when their boat capsizes; when Margaret and Chacko return, they discover her body on the sofa.

After Baby Kochamma accuses Velutha of being responsible for Sophie's death, he is severely beaten and taken into custody by the police. The twins find themselves eyewitnesses to this terrible event. The illegal arrest of Velutha has the chief of police worried that he may cause trouble due to his Communist sympathies. Velutha threatens Baby Kochamma because she wrongly accused him. For his own escape, Baby Kochamma uses a ruse to have Rahel and Estha accuse Velutha of killing Sophie. As a result of his injuries, Velutha dies. Baby Kochamma convinces Chacko that Ammu and the twins are responsible for Sophie's death, despite Ammu's attempts to tell the truth. Following Chacko's ejection of Estha from the house, the two remain deeply separated. At the age of 31, Ammu dies at a motel. Ayemenem welcomes Rahel back from his tumultuous life in America, where he attended college. Baby Kochamma is back with her caretaker, Estha, who had been nurturing him in secret. There is sexual activity between the two. They are still miserable people, even now they are back together. The reader is left contemplating the love bond shared by Ammu and Velutha as the tale comes to a close.

Intersectionality in “*The God of Small Things*” Novel Can Be Summarised As: -

The "Love Laws": The tragic love affair between Ammu and Velutha triggers the interplay of gender, class, and caste, which in turn causes the terrible ruin of their lives and the families they've built.

Double Marginalization of Ammu: Divorced high-caste woman Ammu is cut off from family life and society's protection because she rejects patriarchy's demands of respectability.

Intersection of Caste and Class by Velutha: Velutha's lower-caste status (Untouchable) makes him a target for violence, despite the fact that he is talented in his labor (class). This proves that innate biases and prejudices in society, as well as a lack of professional competence, cannot eradicate structural caste discrimination.

Postcolonial Hypocrisy: Communist politics in Kerala, according to Roy, and the Christian community in Syria both perpetuate social discrimination and conventional hierarchies rather than liberating the oppressed.

3. THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS (2017)

"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" was the 2017 publication of Indian author Arundhati Roy's second book. Her first book, *The God of Small Things*, came out twenty years prior to this. The storyline follows characters as they navigate through some of the darkest and bloodiest episodes in contemporary Indian history, including the eviction of impoverished farmers owing to land reform, the 2002 Godhra train fire, the Bhopal catastrophe, and the Kashmir insurgency. Thirdly, Roy's varied cast includes a boss in the Indian intelligence service, an intersex woman called a hijra, and an architect who rebels against authority. Although the story mostly takes place in Kashmir and Delhi, it also covers other decades and locations.

In the first part of the book, the captivating story of Anjum is introduced through the slightly humorous third-person narration. When Anjum's mother and a dubious surgeon were unable to normalize her, she decided to take matters into her own hands and became a member of the Khwabgah hijra community. Anjum leaves the girl Zainab she was caring for and seeks safety in a graveyard when she becomes caught up in the widespread unrest in India. There, she befriends a guy who has changed his identity to Saddam Hussain, in commemoration of the honor with which Saddam was executed. Throughout the book, you may find several snippets of knowledge that demonstrate how the Western perspective is not the only one.

"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" is a fictional work that features relentlessly ripped edges, clumsy pace, and rare longueurs. The film's layered narratives—which include humorous, tragic, violent, earthy, and otherworldly parts—recur throughout, as do images of children gone and found, personal sacrifice and self-denial, and the ongoing struggle for independence in a society that is still dominated by social stratification. As a whole, it's a disturbing and unforgettable trip back to fantasy land.

The idea of marginalized intersections is explored in Arundhati Roy's novel "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" against the backdrop of a neoliberal society. Persons' lives are impacted greatly by the interaction of numerous social identities, such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, and class, as depicted in Roy's story. These phenomena are complicated and multidimensional. In the midst of India's present geopolitical climate—which is both uncertain and turbulent—the narrative explores the everyday lives of individuals caught in the middle of these interrelated oppressions.

One of the book's main characters, Anjum, is a transgender woman who fights against prejudice and societal expectations. "As one of the hijras who had felt unrepresented in the campaigns against the Indian Government's criminalization of homosexual sex acts," according to Mendes & Lau (2020) in their story about Anjum.

As her life demonstrates, there are multiple forms of marginalization experienced by individuals who grapple with both conventional gender roles and contemporary social changes. She created a sanctuary in a cemetery called the Ministry of Utmost Happiness, which represents a civilization where the oppressed find support and friendship despite the harsh reality of the outside world. Additionally, there's the tale of Tilottama, aka "Tilo," an activist-turned-architect who, in the eyes of some readers, stands in for Roy. On her travels, Tilottama meets three men: the journalist Naga, the intelligence officer Biplab, and the Kashmiri separatist Musa, who "turns to militancy and his wife, Arifa, and his daughter, Miss Jabeen, are killed by the security forces." In the backdrop of all this, there is political unrest in India, ranging from the Maoist insurgency to the Kashmiri conflict.

At the intersection of Tilo's personal experiences of marginalization as a woman and an activist with geopolitical unrest, "she has witnessed the brutal treatment of citizens by military officers" underscores the wider social effects of neoliberal policies, as the state's disengagement worsens the plight of individuals caught between these intersections of identity. Beyond merely exposing hidden aspects of identity, the book contextualizes these themes within the broader neoliberal paradigm, highlighting the vast disparity between the unfettered flow of capital and the stifled movement of oppressed individuals. As a result of neoliberalism's drive for privatization and market supremacy, rising inequality has disproportionately affected society's most vulnerable individuals.

"Away from the lights and advertisements, villages are being emptied," represents Roy's "consistent representation of an India rife with aggressive capitalism, uncaring neoliberal forces, and oppressive social conformities." This exemplifies how neoliberalism attacks state-run welfare programs and social institutions. In addition to cities and towns. Millions of people were being transferred, and no one knows what became of them. Neoliberal tendencies worsen society overall by reinforcing racial and classist biases, which in turn worsen already existing socioeconomic disparities. The fundamental principle of neoliberalism is individualism, which disregards the interrelated nature of many types of discrimination and, as a result, does little to tackle the fundamental reasons of inequality.

"People have been constituted as individuals in and by authority." This problem hits women from ethnic minority groups who work in informal or unstable job markets especially hard because "they are in different kinds of strategic relationships with one another as individuals and representatives of social groups." This is especially true for people who are already experiencing multiple forms of oppression. As Roy demonstrates, their desires for her old, rigid hips and the transformation of her frown line into a fixed, vacuous smile are examples of the abstract and concrete issues these women confront.

In the summer when Grandma became a whore, she was on her way to becoming the capital of the most beloved new superpower in the world. Many people's daily lives are shaped by the intersection of several structural injustices, such as limited access to healthcare and education, job instability, and gender-based violence. The neoliberal viewpoint, defined by a focus on economic efficiency, tends to view interpersonal relationships as just commodities. Anjum, a Hijra character in the book, chooses to live as a woman despite being born Aftab. According to Jahanara Begum, Aftab's mother, "For the first few years of Aftab's life... secret remained safe." This meant that Aftab was unable to escape the stigma associated with being a transgender woman, no matter how much her parents tried. As she said her goodbyes to his genital area as it healed. She made a strong statement against a culture that rejects transgender folks by courageously establishing a community named "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" and residing in a graveyard. Given the absence of social security protections within an individualist neoliberal paradigm, this emphasizes how gender minorities are already at a greater disadvantage. It is evident that her life is precariously predicated on informal networks, as there are no institutional mechanisms designed to assist individuals like her.

Intersectionality in "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*" (2017) Can Be Summarized:

Marginalization and Religion – Muslim identity is portrayed as a point of vulnerability in cases of communal violence and state oppression.

Sexuality and Gender – At the nexus of gender nonconformity, social rejection, and violence, the narrative highlights hijra identity through Anjum.

Caste and Class – Roy highlights the ways in which economic disparity and social stratification worsen marginalization, making it more difficult to attain justice and dignity.

Interconnected Oppressions – Roy emphasizes that prejudice is never an isolated incidence because gender, politics, religion, and caste all combine to shape people's daily lives.

Patriarchy and Women - Gender and the dynamics of social and political power are shown through the experiences of female characters like Tilo, who are subjected to punishment, stifling, and control.

Political Violence & State Power – The protagonists' stories illustrate the ways in which individual identities are impacted by nationalism, militarization, and monitoring.

Conflict of Kashmir – Interconnections between religion, politics, and ethnicity illustrate the multi-layered pain caused by the long-term military occupation in the book.

4. CONCLUSION

In this study, attention is directed to the ways Arundhati Roy portrays subaltern females and acts of defiance, focusing on “The God of Small Things” and “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness”. It seeks to reveal ways Roy’s characters demonstrate adapting tactics while dealing with tyranny. In the works of Roy, subaltern females confront various forms of injustice that relate to society, culture, and government. However, there is a level of variation regarding the scope of their defiance. Both frameworks reveal ways Roy’s subaltern females, like gender intersectionality according to Crenshaw, adjust their acts of defiance over time in accordance with the world around them.

Roy’s female characters in “The God of Small Things” are constrained by patriarchal ideologies and caste politics when it comes to asserting their independence and agency in both home and society at large. Consider the character of Ammu, who plays a major part in the novel and resists patriarchal ideologies by selecting her own marriage and controlling her intimate life, even though she breaks caste and social norms in doing so. However, this act of rebellion by Ammu occurs entirely in her own sphere and reinforces the concept of “subaltern agency,” in which the oppressed try to wake up and become aware of their situation and struggle to assert themselves in response; however, this struggle occurs largely in confines dictated by the borders of the confining society itself.

In “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness”, the scope of subaltern women’s resistance begins to rise above their personal lives and descends into the realm of the political and the gendered roles expected of each woman in society. Anjum and Tilotama, two of the later inclusions in the canon of Roy’s works, represent a new breed of women who choose to defy the status quo on issues of economic inequality, transgender identity, religion, caste, and gender roles in society. In the face of political and governmental oppression, these women join other oppressed groups in society to launch their acts of defiance against the political status quo. The actions of the women who declare themselves to be transgender and the religiously and politically torn Tilotama present their form of counter-hegemony to economic inequality in their joining together against it. However, some of the issues in the works of Roy present much to be researched and discussed by scholars in the world of academia. The role of religion in the lives of women who declare themselves to be female in the face of environmental atrocities, the role of memories in traumas and the ways in which the global community has come to portray queer and transgender individuals in the literature of the current era present much to be probed in analysis of Roy’s works.

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