
LEGAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS IN THE BOOK "THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS"

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ABSTRACT

The novel “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness” by Arundhati Roy discusses the social and political environment in India by narrating two different stories. The author at first delivers the story of a 'Hijra' or a transgender person. It talks about the birth of Anjum, the protagonist, and describes the struggles he or she faced in life as a member of the Muslim transgender community. Anjum, born as Aftab, leaves home to 'Khwabgah' where hijras live. When she grows up, she adopts a kid who later falls ill. Anjum goes to Ajmer for prayers and returns to Ahmedabad with a friend, where she becomes a refugee due to ongoing riots. She returns to Khwabgah only to leave that place and move to a graveyard where she builds a home and lives with a Dalit man who wants to seek revenge for his father's death. The other story is about an illegitimate child, Tilottama. The plot revolves around men who loved her and how they helped her. The author interconnects two stories at the end. The novel discusses issues such as the Indo-Pak war, Hindu-Muslim riots, lives of Hijra in India, the Caste system, Freedom of speech and expression and military encounters in Kashmir. The research aims to find out and analyse the social and legal aspects present in the novel.

Keywords: Hijra, Social Aspects, Freedom of speech and expression, Legal Aspects

INTRODUCTION

About the Author

"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" is a fiction by Arundhati Roy, renowned for "The God of Small Things", that won the Man Booker Prize. She was born in Shillong, Meghalaya, in 1961 to a Malayali mother and Bengali father. She completed her schooling in Kerala and later pursued B.Arch.

She wrote screenplays for television and movies during her early years, including "In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones". Her first novel, written in 1996, "The God of Small Things", talks about the love laws created by society. She was praised for her writing style, which details every small thing. She mainly discusses the political and social issues in India in her works. Her non-fiction works are "The Algebra of Infinite Justice", "Listening to Grasshoppers", "Broken Republic", etc. She received the "National Film Award for best screenplay" for "In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones" in 1989. She was awarded the "Sydney Peace Prize" in 2004. She won the "Sahitya Academy Award" in 2006 for "The Algebra of Infinite Justice". She was included in the 2014 Time 100 list.

About the Book

The book is dedicated to the unconsolated lives of a transwoman and an illegitimate child. The novel begins by describing 'passing away of friendly old birds', that is, the white-backed vultures, due to poisoning by diclofenac, a muscle relaxant given to enhance milk production in cows. It is an attempt to point out the effects of industrialisation in Delhi, where the story takes place. The first story begins by distinguishing Majnu, a fictional romantic character, from Anjum, the main character. The author presents a conversation between an old imam and Anjum, then takes the readers to the past and narrates how Aftab became Anjum. The author describes the birth of Aftab, a boy born to a typical Indian family who prefers a male child to a girl. But the following day, his mother finds that Aftab possesses a 'female part'. She tries to hide this from Aftab's father, a herbal medicine practitioner known as a Hakim. The family keeps it a secret and tries to cure their child through prayers and cultivate male features in him. Aftab is bullied by other kids when his identity is revealed, making him unable to go to school. One day he is attracted by someone wearing salwar, bangles and lipstick. He understands that it is not a woman as women in that area only wore burkha. Aftab, who wears a men's suit, follows 'her' and reaches 'Khwabgah', the house of dreams. Initially, society makes him stay

away from the place due to superstitions revolving around the hijra community. Finally, Aftab turns into Anjum and becomes an official member of the 'Hijra' community. Due to this, Aftab's father cut all ties with him and considers he brought shame to his family. The author represents Anjum as a talented, passionate and kind transwoman.

The author also presents some social issues through the lives of other members of Khwabgah like difficulties they face while pursuing studies, in marriage, permission to enter holy places, failure in surgeries done to change their physical features, superstitions surrounding transgender people, how the society view them as happiness hunters and the dilemma to call he or she. Due to motherly instinct, Anjum raises an abandoned kid. The story takes a turn when Anjum leaves for Ahmedabad during the Gujarat riots. She was not killed as society considers killing hijras as bad luck. She becomes a refugee in Gujarat, returns to Khwabgah and finally builds a home at the graveyard where she lives happily.

The second story is about Tilottama (Tilo), an illegitimate child, loved by three college mates. Tilo falls in love with Musa, a Kashmiri architect, a suspected terrorist. Police also search Tilo as she takes an abandoned child during the Jantar Mantar protest. At the end of the novel, Tilo and baby reaches the house of Anjum for help.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research presents the summary of the novel to understand the conditions of characters present. The research explains the lives of characters in the context of social and legal dilemmas faced by them. It is analytical in nature. It is a qualitative as the paper analyses non-numerical data. Legal aspects are presented in the paper by connecting instances from the story with legal provisions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research tries to answer the following questions

1. What are the social aspects in the novel?
2. What are the legal aspects in the novel?
3. What are the legal provisions in Indian legislation related to the novel?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of the research is to understand legal and social aspects in the novel and how the legal provisions especially those in the constitution are connected to the lives of characters in the novel.

LITERATURE REVIEW

World literature review by Amit R. Baishya, the researcher presents the irony by connecting the introduction which describes the harmful effects caused by industrialisation in Delhi and the excitement of Kusloom Bi, a transwoman in Khwabgah, to go to Red Fort. In the review by Marthine Sattris the researcher presents how the author includes characters from weaker sections of the society in the novel and talks about how the society views them and their progress. In the new subaltern in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*: a postcolonial study by Nusrat Jahan the struggles of women, transgenders and lower caste people are presented through the characters in the novel. In the review by Javeed Ahmed Raina presents how the story is trying to explain political and historical conditions in India. In the review by Mariam Ilyas Siddique the researcher explains that the social struggles faced by characters are representation of problems faced by Indian society.

In a polyphonic study of Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* the researcher mentions that the novel presents so many problems which are prevalent in the Indian society and the book through its characters raises the voice for unheard. In the research paper by Rajneesh Kumar and Nakul Kundra the researchers explain how the novel presents cases of police brutality. *The Organization of Power in Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness: A Foucauldian Reading* describes that the powerful in the society suppresses weaker and the novel clearly presents it. In the research paper *Gendered Spaces Captured in Cultural Representations: Conceptualising the Indian Experience in Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the researcher explains the gender distinctions presented in the novel through the lives of Tilo and Anjum, a transwoman. *Postcolonialism in Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* analyses the Indian society after the era of British, the change in culture and developments too place in India.

ANALYSIS

The novel is about the lives of Anjum, a transwoman and S. Tilottama. Though they have

different stories both of them faces troubles in their lives. During the birth of first protagonist Anjum who was born as Aftab, his family received him happily as they were expecting a baby boy. Through this the author presents the some people, even though they are educated prefers a boy over girl. By preventing amniocentesis and by introducing schemes for girl child this year for the first time females in the country outnumbered males.

But the main issue that author portrays in the first story is society and its attitude towards Hijras and how just stereotyping made their lives difficult. When Aftab's mother discovers that the kid is a transwoman she panics and hide it from Aftab's father. They try to seek remedy for the illness of their kid through prayers. When the parents took the kid to the doctor they hid it from everyone, sometime said lies to the neighbour. When Aftab first time saw a hijra he followed her and reached the Khwabgah where all transpeople of that area lives. Other people makes him stay away from Khwabgah as his father is a reputed person. Even though Aftab was talented, he couldn't attend classes unlike his siblings as he was bullied by other kids. Later when Aftab officially become a hijra as per the rituals of hijra community his father, a descendant of Chengiz Khan, thinks that Anjum destroyed the name of the family, cut all ties with him and never talked to him.

The author presents the real situation of transgender community which contradicts the stereotyping. People consider hijras as kidnappers who performs castration of kidnapped young boys. But in reality every Hijra community is organised with a head to control them. The author presents an irony by describing the meaning of the term hijra. It means body in which a holy soul lives. Even the educated transwoman, Nimmo Gorakhpuri was abandoned by her husband. Most of the transwoman in Khawbgah are fooled by quacks in the name of surgery to alter their physical features. The motherly instinct in Anjum makes her to take away an abandoned child during Indo-Pak war. The kid was weak but Anjum took care of the child and named her Zainab. The story also talks about how media uses transgender people to tell their stories and include their own fake stories in them to increase ratings. Anjum travelled to Ahmedabad with an old man where they came across riots. The author describes that he was too old to be embarrassed to travel with a hijra. But ironically, Anjum is not killed in the riots only because of stereotyping about hijras that is it is a bad luck to kill a hijra.

After this incident Anjum moves to a graveyard which she turns into her house and find peace. Then she meets Saddam Hossein, an educated man who works in a mortuary. He was the only muslim working there and his job was to deal with dead bodies, which is a job meant for

untouchables and the upper caste people considered them as polluted. Through his story the author explains the condition of poor people who are ready to work at extreme conditions with less pay and the problem of educated unemployment. His actual name was Dayachand and he was inspired by Saddam Hussein, leader of Iraq who was hung. He wanted to seek revenge to the police officer who was responsible for death of his father in a lynching.

Author also presents the conditions in India. Even though India became famous all over the world, begging was banned and poor were evicted from city; people protested for several reasons. The protestors were resettled people, Bhopal gas tragedy victims, mothers of dead and missing Kashmiris and Manipuri people protesting against AFSPA. The government began to charge for public toilets without giving food for its citizen. Women were harassed and Section 144 was imposed to silence the protestors. Media asked illogical questions to the poor and protestors. People cooked, bathed and washed on roads. Corruption in the country rose. This shows how the right guaranteed under Art 21, Right to life and Personal liberty is violated. People were not even having the basic facilities such as food, cloth, shelter or a job.

At the protest site when Anjum picks up an abandoned child she is again discriminated as she is a transwoman. The kid is finally taken away by Tilo who was an architecture student who is an illegitimate child born to a Christian mother and a Paraya father. She wears second hand clothes which are actually clothes taken from dead bodies. Tilo's mother was a feminist and she established a school with new teaching methods. Tilo falls in love with Musa, a quiet and gentle guy who is a part of Kashmir resistance. When Tilo travels to Kashmir she is shaved as a punishment for treason. The author clearly presents an example of police brutality. This is a violation of Art 22 which guarantees some rights to convicts. The novel also depicts the instances of violation of Art 19 Freedom of Speech and Expression by silencing the protestors.

Both the protagonists are the victims of discrimination which is a violation of Art 15 of the Indian Constitution. Art 15 (1) condemns any discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth. Saddam is a victim of caste discrimination. Tilo is also a victim of caste discrimination as she is born to a father belonging to lower caste. The novel depicts several instances of color discrimination. Tilo is discriminated because of her skin color. The advertisement of Vaseline, which shows a girl with a smiling face after applying the cream are some of them. At the end of the novel, Tilo and the kid come to Jannat Guest house of Anjum, which earlier was a graveyard, for help. Zainab marries Saddam and rides in a

Mercedes, which is a dream come true for them. They meet some hijras who are begging on the road and invited them for wedding. They were in awe of Anjum's rich and happy life.

CONCLUSION

Arundati Roy through her novels explains the social issues present in the Indian society. In this novel she presents a wide range of issues such as problems faced by transgender, caste discrimination, police brutality, gender discrimination, color discrimination, lives of poor people etc. The main issue depicted through Anjum's life is the discrimination faced by transgenders. Even though the conditions of transgender community is improving, there are taboos still prevalent in the society. Similarly the caste discrimination is also abolished by law. The law has evolved over time and now provides protection from all evils once existed in the society. Law considers all as equal under Art 14 and provides protection for all approaching the court if their right is infringed. But the real problem is the lack of representation to raise voices of marginal communities.

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