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**Political Issues in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*:  
A Study**

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**Abstract:**

Arundhati Roy's literary works, encompassing both fiction and non-fiction, concentrate on genuine political and social issues impacting the common people in India. In her novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy adeptly depicts significant political events and issues, including the 2002 Godhra train burning, the Gujarat riots, assaults on Dalits accused of cow slaughter, the Una Dalit uprising, the 2011 Lokpal movement, the Kashmir conflict, and the challenges faced by the Maoists. These instances illustrate how political power, religious intolerance, and social injustice persist in harming the vulnerable and the marginalised. This research paper examines how Roy employs fiction not merely to narrate a story, but to reveal the anguish and challenges faced by marginalised individuals. It also analyses how she reveals the profound political, social, and religious conflicts inside the nation. Her writing intertwines personal experiences with broader political realities, prompting readers to contemplate problems of justice, equality, and human rights.

**Keywords:** Humanism, Communal Violence, Caste Discrimination, Gender Inequality

**Introduction:**

Arundhati Roy's works focus on political, national and religious issues and they are the impression of her inner ideas. Non-fiction specially focuses on arguments. Fiction can provide a lot of innovative themes. In connection to this, Roy says: "My non-fiction writing is often an argument, but fiction is where you construct a realm in which the reader is invited to walk. It's a lot trickier than that. It gives me the greatest pleasure. It satisfies me the most when I write fiction because I feel like I am employing all of my skills" (Roy, Writing non-fiction 22). Since she wrote many non-fictions, critics argue that she is an expert in writing non-fictions but indeed, she wants to write fictions. She says: "My personal objectives as a fiction writer were more important to me. I'm sure there were some people who were disappointed, but writing isn't about pleasing everyone. You are responsible for conducting your own research" (Roy, Writing non-fiction 1).

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Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* addresses numerous significant political and social issues, including communal violence, caste discrimination, gender inequality, and the abuse of power by authorities. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is the worth of ten year writing and twenty year waiting. It was translated into 46 languages. (Lewis 1) Roy discusses the intricate relationship between human pain and broader political conflicts through characters such as Anjum, Tilo, and Musa. The suffering of each character embodies societal anguish, illustrating how identity and resistance are influenced by injustice and oppression. Through a lucid and pragmatic writing style, Roy transforms actual political occurrences into poignant human narratives that evoke empathy and provoke profound contemplation about the surrounding world.

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is big, both in physical heft and in ideas. It features an unforgettable cast of characters from across India whose stories are told with generosity and compassion. (Kreizman 1)

Mittapalli rightly says:

The novel offers a mind-numbing account of how almost all its major characters experience silence for reasons beyond their control, birth, sexual orientation, social/cultural impositions, and so on but finally learn to break it in their own individual ways. In the process, they achieve a limited realization of their true selves and learn to manage the fear, hypocrisy, and negativity imposed on them. (Mittapalli 7)

The novel tells a story that “depicts the gaps and ruptures but ultimately untangles the web of human relationships by reuniting the protagonists, who make peace despite their many complaints against one another.” Some characters alter their names and identities, but eventually reappear and reevaluate their roles in order to bring harmony to the world” (Mishra 10). The novel divided into 12 chapters. It explains about the life of two main characters—Anjum, a Hijra and Tilo, an architect. The writer provides the lifestyle of *hijra* community. The novel begins with: “She lived in the graveyard like a tree. At dawn she saw the crows off and welcomed the bats home” (Roy, *Ministry* 3) and the novelist explains the heinous condition of transgender. Anjum didn't turn to notice which small boy had thrown a stone at her if ever it happens. She didn't hoist her neck to read the criticism happened backside of her or while walking on the road. When people called her names, the novelist claims she “let the hurt blow through her branches like a breeze and utilised the music of her rustling leaves as salve to heal her suffering” (Roy, *Ministry* 3).

Anjum who was a transgender was known as Aftab. Anjum was born in a middle class Muslim family. His father never received him as a child. The fact of his sexuality alarmed his mother Jahara Begum and on knowing that her son is a transgender. She is very much anxious about his future. She “recoiled from what she had created” (Roy, *Ministry* 2). She even made her mind to kill herself and her child. The writer says:

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In Urdu, her native language, everything had a gender, including carpets, garments, books, pens, and musical instruments. Everything was either masculine or feminine, masculine or feminine, male or woman. Except for her baby. Of course, she was aware that there was a term for people like him: Hijra. Actually, Hijra and Kinnar are two terms. Two words, however, do not constitute a language. (Roy, *Ministry* 8)

Arundhati Roy compellingly highlights the distressing phenomenon of mob lynching targeting impoverished and marginalised individuals, frequently accused of cow slaughter without substantiation. She narrates the poignant tale of Dayachand, alias Saddam Hussain, who emerges as a significant figure in the narrative. Upon Anjum's inquiry on his history, he recounts his poignant narrative.

Terrorism in Kashmir is one of the political issues that Arundhati Roy discusses realistically in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. In the novel, she gives readers a deeper understanding of Major Amrik Singh, a character who appears to be a hero trying to protect the country by eliminating dangerous terrorists and maintaining peace in the valley. However, Roy also shows that he is not truly a hero. In reality, he becomes a villainous figure, killing innocent Kashmiri youth under the pretext of fighting terrorism. He even brutally murders the human rights activist Jalib Quadari, which leads to him being targeted by both the army and civil rights groups, forcing him to flee India.

Arundhati Roy uses her novel to reveal the hidden truths about the problems in Kashmir, drawing from her own observations and experiences. She does this through the character Biplab, an IB officer, who acts as her voice to explain the complex realities of the region. Biplab explains that most militants in Kashmir have short lives, they are either killed or captured by the security forces. If any survive, they are often eliminated by their own groups, as the security forces create situations that force such outcomes.

Biplab points out that the main reason for the spread of militancy is the growing influence of the idea of jihad in Kashmir. He also explains that there are eight or nine different interpretations of Islam practiced in the region, each with its own Mullahs and Maulanas. Some of these Maulanas are secretly working with the security forces. They help guide the authorities, gather information about extremists, and spread ideas to gain the trust of militant groups. The Maulanas who openly speak against nationalism are often working for the security forces, pretending to support extremist views to gain credibility among militants. Occasionally, these agents are discovered and killed by militant groups, which shows how dangerous their work is. Through this, Roy presents Kashmir not just as a land of conflict, but as a complex network of political, religious, and human struggles, showing how both the militants and the authorities operate in morally and strategically complicated ways.

Biplab also raises an important question: why does Kashmir often remain calm, even after major conflicts between common people and the security forces? He explains that the answer is connected to business and the economy of the region. Most Kashmiri people have significant businesses, while many others depend on tourism for their livelihood. They prefer peace and stability because both business and tourism can only thrive in normal, calm conditions. During long curfews or periods of violence, businesses suffer losses, and the number of tourists drops sharply. Therefore, despite the political tensions and struggles, many people try to maintain normalcy in their daily lives to protect their economic interests. Roy's portrayal of this situation shows the complex balance in Kashmir, where social, political, and economic factors are deeply intertwined. It also highlights how ordinary people navigate conflicts pragmatically, often prioritizing survival and livelihood over direct involvement in protests or resistance.

Arundhati Roy provides deep insights into the issues in Kashmir, revealing many events and realities that are usually hidden from ordinary citizens. While discussing these issues, she tries to maintain a balanced approach, but in some areas, her focus is limited. She describes the struggles of the local people in great detail, covering everything from the indifference of security forces to the killing of hostages and innocent civilians. However, she gives very little attention to the plight of the Kashmiri Pandits, who were forced to leave their homes and flee to other places to protect their lives and the lives of their families. Although the novel briefly mentions their exodus, this reference is not enough to fully explain their suffering. The problems faced by Kashmiri Pandits are complex and significant, and a few lines cannot fully convey their pain, especially given the novel's length and its main focus on other aspects of the Kashmir conflict. This gap shows that while Roy captures many hidden truths of Kashmir, some perspectives, particularly of minority communities like the Pandits, receive less attention, highlighting the challenges of covering such a vast and complicated issue in one work.

The writer has shown the problems of Adivasis also. They are asked to leave the forest as the government plans to establish industries there. The novel gives how they are forced to leave it. The Bhopal gas leak episode in India has an effect on the thousand lives. It caused many deaths because of it and numerous people became blind. "A devastating gas leak at the Union Carbide pesticide facility in Bhopal killed thousands of people. People rushing to leave the deadly fog that pervaded them, their eyes and lungs on fire, were reported in the press. The type and scope of horror had an almost biblical feel to it" (Roy, *Ministry* 151). The writer has expressed that Operation Green Hunt was announced by Government. Thousands of domineering police and paramilitary, who were in the forest, killed adivasis and burnt their villages, and the writer says:

No adivasi is allowed to stay in her home or village. They sleep outside in the jungle at night because police, hundreds, two hundred, and even five hundred, arrive

at night. They seize everything, burn everything down, and steal it. Money, chickens, and goats. They want the adivasis to leave the forest so that they can build a steel township and mine. (Roy, *Ministry* 421)

Roy expressed the lives of Naxals in the forest. Since they had chosen hunger strike, they request the government for their rights. A maoist clearly explains all the incidents in a letter. She was raped by police man who is on duty. It had given a child to her. She joined naxals and gave up the child for her future in the village. The incident shows how the poor and illiterate women are raped and kept aside very easily as they don't know much about the society and law. It is very easy to deceive the poor women. Their voice was unheard for all. Since the rural and silent women are not in a position to fight against the law, they keep silent which makes all Tillotama also humiliated and gone through mental torture as she married to a militant named Musa.

Arundhati Roy has explored many contemporary issues in her novel, including the Godhra riots, mob justice, Dalit uprisings, the Lokpal movement, Kashmir conflicts, and tribal problems. She presents these issues in a thoughtful and insightful way, focusing on their root causes. By examining each theme, readers can see that Roy takes a balanced approach, showing multiple perspectives and avoiding one-sided storytelling. One of her great achievements is how she brings together very different characters on a single platform, making the story rich and interconnected. Despite the serious issues, the novel ends on a positive note, giving hope to readers. Many characters, like Saddam, Zainab, Anjum, and Tilottama, find peace and happiness in their lives, while negative characters, such as Amrik Singh, face suffering and die in the wilderness. This demonstrates poetic justice, as good ultimately prevails over evil.

Roy successfully transforms complex sociopolitical problems into fictional events that feel real and emotional. The novel engages the reader deeply, evoking a range of emotions—sadness, pity, joy, and laughter. By blending social critique with storytelling, Roy makes the reader reflect on society, human nature, and the possibilities of justice and hope, showing the power of literature to raise awareness and inspire thought.

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