The Politics of Representing Gender and Sexuality in Arundhati Roy's Selected Books

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy, through her powerful blend of fiction and non-fiction, shatters conventional representations of gender and sexuality in contemporary India. This paper delves into Roy's work, specifically "Broken Republic" (non-fiction essays) and "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" (novel), to explore how she dismantles societal expectations across different social backgrounds. "Broken Republic" serves as a potent critique, where Roy exposes the patriarchal structures and dominant narratives that confine and define gender and sexuality. The contrasting titles, "Khwabgah" (dream world) and "Kondh" (an indigenous tribe), hint at the spectrum Roy explores. Through this comparison, we can analyse how Roy portrays the experiences of marginalised communities like women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and religious minorities, who face various forms of discrimination that intersect with their gender and sexual identities. This research paper examines how Roy employs both fiction and non-fiction to champion agency and resistance. Ultimately, the paper also explores how Roy uses her voice to amplify those silenced by societal norms, advocating for social change and a more inclusive vision of both gender and sexuality in contemporary India. The paper uses intersectionality theory to examine and analyse the two texts to bring out the nuances in how Roy has portrayed women and transgender individuals and the power dynamics that exist in their respective worlds.

Keywords: gender, sexuality, Arundhati Roy, Subaltern

1. Introduction

Arundhati Roy, a renowned critic of the state and capitalism, has constantly voiced for various minority groups in her works- from religious minorities to gendered minorities. Roy's body of work goes beyond the boundaries of fiction, encompassing essays, film scripts, and activism – all having a common thread which is a persistent commitment to amplifying the voices of the marginalised. Her literary career started with The God of Small Things (1997), which went on to win her the Man Booker Prize. From the first book till the latest one, she has consistently championed rights of different minority groups and represented the voiceless- those facing discrimination based on religion, caste, gender and sexuality. Roy excels in storytelling about gender and sexuality, especially when it involves an authentic account of a person belonging to a minority group and approaches the issue in a nuanced manner. She consciously breaks down stereotypes with facts and first-hand encounters, and reconstructs a whole new identity for them- one that is true and authentic and not driven by propaganda. This can be evidently seen in the two texts that have been taken for this study- Broken Republic (2011) and The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017). The research aims to critically analyse how Roy employs both fiction and non-fiction to represent and challenge intersecting structures of gender, sexuality, caste, and religion in contemporary India. It seeks to explore the narrative strategies Roy uses to amplify silenced voices and examine how her work dismantles dominant societal norms through an intersectional lens.

Roy's Broken Republic serves as a powerful critique of the Indian state's failures and its unjust treatment of tribal communities in Central India. Roy documents various forms of systemic injustice, including violence against religious minorities, the forced displacement of Adivasis (indigenous communities), and the limited and often biased access to judicial procedures available to these marginalized groups (Nixon, 2011; Sundar, 2016). This paper, in particular, focuses on Roy's treatment of gender issues and how women in Broken Republic challenge patriarchal structures that have long defined their identities and roles within their communities. As scholars have noted, Roy's portrayal of women in these resistance movements underscores the intersection of gender and political struggle, revealing how women emerge as agents of change within oppressive social and political contexts (Menon, 2012).

In contrast, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness creates a richly layered fictional world that brings together diverse characters who defy conventional social expectations. Roy portrays the lives of hijras (eunuchs), transgender persons, refugees, and other marginalized individuals, offering an insightful exploration of the complex intersections of gender and sexuality (Bose, 2020). Through this narrative, Roy investigates the struggles for agency and self-determination among these communities, highlighting how their marginalized identities

intersect with broader social and political structures (Gopal, 2019). Set in the metropolitan landscape of New Delhi, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness contrasts sharply with the rural and forested settings of Broken Republic in Central India. This geographical and social contrast allows Roy to explore gender and sexuality across diverse socio-political landscapes, illustrating how marginalization operates differently in urban and rural contexts (Bhattacharya, 2017).

The juxtaposition of Broken Republic and The Ministry of Utmost Happiness offers a valuable framework for analyzing Roy's nuanced approach to representing gender and sexuality. The contrasting titles themselves suggest deeper thematic undercurrents: "Khwabgah," which translates to "dream world," evokes the idea of transcending restrictive social norms, whereas "Kondh" refers to an indigenous tribe, highlighting alternative social structures and gender roles rooted in indigenous traditions (Bose, 2020; Sundar, 2016). Roy's engagement with these distinct social and cultural settings reflects her broader effort to dismantle hegemonic narratives about gender and sexuality, challenging both patriarchal and state-imposed structures (Menon, 2012; Gopal, 2019). Through this comparative lens, Roy's work emerges as a critique of contemporary Indian society's rigid social hierarchies, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable vision of humanity (Bhattacharya, 2017).

2. Theoretical Framework

This research paper will use intersectionality theory to analyse the complex nature of power structures oppressing women and transgender individuals in Arundhati Roy's Broken Republic and The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. Intersectionality argues that social identities like gender, class, and caste are not independent but rather interlocking, creating unique experiences of marginalisation. The paper will explore how Roy portrays the ways these factors intersect to disadvantage women and transgender individuals. For instance, an Adivasi or dalit woman might face a more brutal form of gender-based violence due to her caste status, while a transgender sex worker might encounter discrimination based on both gender identity and profession. By employing intersectionality, this paper aims to bring out the multilayered nature of oppression in Roy's work and advocate for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by marginalised communities.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in feminist and intersectional frameworks to examine the complex interplay of gender, sexuality, class, and caste as depicted in the selected texts. A close textual analysis serves as the primary method, drawing on tools from discourse analysis, narrative theory, and thematic coding to engage with the novels' representations of marginalized identities. The analysis is informed by Michel Foucault's theory of power and discourse, Judith Butler's concept of performativity, and Gayatri Spivak's notion of subalternity, providing a critical lens to interrogate how power, resistance, and identity are constructed within the narrative. By utilizing these analytical tools, the research facilitates a deeper exploration of narrative structures, character development, and language, thus enabling a nuanced understanding of the socio-political contexts shaping the lives of women and transgender individuals. This methodological approach aims to uncover the textual strategies through which the novels articulate and negotiate the lived experiences and resistances of subaltern groups.

4. Results and Analysis

Intersectionality examines how various social and political identities, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, overlap to create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege. Transgender individuals often face multiple forms of oppression based on their gender identity, as well as other factors like race, class, and sexual orientation. For example, a Muslim transgender woman may experience discrimination based on her race, gender identity, and gender expression. Intersectionality helps to illuminate the complex and layered nature of these experiences, highlighting the need for nuanced and inclusive approaches to address the challenges faced by transgender people.

Roy's portrayal of the world we perceive as "real" is a scathing indictment of societal indifference. This real world, governed by rigid conventions and social expectations, erects walls of prejudice based on gender, sexuality, caste, religion, and countless other factors. Within these confines, individuals like Anjum, who defy societal norms with their sexual identity, face immense difficulty in finding a place to belong. Anjum refers to this world as "Duniya," a place where those like her are deemed insignificant, their very existence often overlooked. Her poignant statement, "we aren't real. We don't really exist" (84), underscores the soul-crushing impact of societal invalidation. This so-called "real world" fails to acknowledge their fundamental humanity, their right to be recognized as individuals within the larger social fabric.

The pressure to conform to a narrow definition of normalcy becomes unbearable for Anjum (previously Aftab).   The text mentions, "he was left with no reason to continue living in what most people thought of as the real world- and Hijras called Duniya, the world" (24). This sense of alienation compels him to take a drastic step. At just fifteen years old, Aftab steals money and his sisters' clothes, abandoning Duniya in search of a more accepting reality. Ironically, the Khwabgah, a haven for those ostracised by society, lies a mere "few hundred yards from where his family had lived for centuries" (25).   Yet, it represents a universe apart.   By stepping through an ordinary doorway, Aftab embarks on a journey into a world where he can finally shed the burden of societal expectations and embrace his true self. From being a new entrant in the Khwabgah to becoming the most important person in there, she climbs up the ladder fast and makes a place for herself in society as well as in the Khwabgah. She turns into a powerful person through her contacts that she made during her time as a sex worker.

Roy portrays tribal women as facing a multitude of hardships and injustices. Roy highlights the vulnerability tribal women face due to displacement from their lands and homes. This displacement disrupts their traditional way of life and exposes them to exploitation by security forces and corporations. Not only are they sexually harassed during the displacement process in the rehabilitation camps, but they

are also taken advantage of by employers in the urban spaces. Women are shown by Roy in a sad plight who are desperate to find any menial job to support their families. The book discusses instances of sexual violence against tribal women by the police and security forces. Roy criticises the lack of protection for these women and the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators. Since these areas are declared and treated as conflict zones, the AFSPA law of the Indian government gives the security personnel full impunity from being prosecuted for their actions, however unlawful they may be.

Roy paints a strong, positive and powerful picture of the women in the book. In spite of the rural background and lack of strong, educated people, Roy's women are portrayed as independent and resilient. They participate in the anti-capitalist conflict actively alongside men by spreading awareness through their organisations and by fighting in the field with arms. They are shown to be actively involved in protecting their land and communities, often alongside the Maoists. They have joined the ranks of the Maoists to fight for what is rightfully theirs. They have also formed organisations of their own to raise awareness about the exploitation of women. This has been met with violent measures by the Salwa Judum.

The Salwa Judum is a people's militia that is armed and funded by the government to fight the Maoists. Office bearers of the organisations run by women in the region are given death threats to curtail the involvement of women in the fight. Bounties are announced for the heads of women leaders, whereas the same does not happen for men. Roy highlights how women holding the same ranks as men in the Maoist struggle are targeted differently because of their gender, whilst men do not get targeted as much. This is done in order to make a statement to everyone in the region that women do not belong on the battlefield and must confine themselves to the traditional tribal roles such as household chores, agriculture, hunting and gathering. Roy emphasises the deep connection tribal women have with the forest. They are depicted as the true protectors and preservers of the environment, with knowledge and practices passed down through generations.

While both tribal men and women face severe challenges in Broken Republic, Roy emphasises the sexual violence faced specifically by the women. The book doesn't have a singular, dedicated focus on gender roles across Indian society. However, through her essays critiquing social and political issues, particularly those faced by marginalised groups like Adivasi (indigenous) communities, she sheds light on the specific challenges women face within these patriarchal structures. This violence is used as a tool of intimidation and control by security forces and is a lesser focus when discussing the hardships of tribal communities. Roy exposes the brutal reality of sexual violence faced by Adivasi women. She criticizes the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators, often security forces, who use sexual violence as a tool to control and intimidate these communities. This highlights the vulnerability women face due to their perceived subordinate position within the power dynamic.

Displacement from land disrupts the traditional roles of both men and women. However, Roy argues that women often lose their access to resources they traditionally gathered in the forest, impacting their ability to contribute to the household. As they lose the right to hunt and gather, they eventually lose the opportunity to be financially independent and become a society of women who have to depend on men. Though the book doesn't delve deeply into traditional gender roles within these communities, Roy does portray tribal women as actively involved in protecting their land and resources. This suggests a level of agency that might not be as explicitly discussed for the men. Roy throws light on how displacement from their ancestral lands dismantles traditional gender roles within Adivasi communities. Women traditionally gathered resources from the forest, contributing significantly to household sustenance. Displacement severs this connection, impacting not just their economic contribution but also their cultural identity.

Despite facing immense hardship, Roy portrays Adivasi women as possessing remarkable resilience. She showcases instances where women actively participate in protecting their land and communities, often alongside the Maoists. This suggests a level of agency that challenges the traditional image of submissive women within a patriarchal society. Roy emphasises the deep connection Adivasi women have with the environment. They are depicted as the true protectors of the forest, possessing generations-old knowledge and practices for sustainable living. This challenges the traditional notion of men being the sole protectors and decision-makers regarding land use.

Arundhati Roy addresses the politics of gender in her book Broken Republic by delving into the complexities of power dynamics and societal norms that influence the lives of women in rural India. Through a postcolonial feminist lens, Roy explores the struggles faced by Indian women, highlighting the oppressive structures of patriarchy and the impact of traditional gender roles on their lives. Women in the region have to face oppression from both their own families and the armed forces. "the Naga Battalion caught Lukki and Sukki and one other girl, gang-raped them and killed them" (Roy, 68). She portrays the challenges women encounter in a male-dominated society, emphasising the limitations imposed on them due to their gender, social status, and cultural norms. In the book, Roy critiques the unequal treatment of women, illustrating how they are often marginalised, constrained, and victimised within the societal framework. She sheds light on the intersectionality of gender, caste, and power relations, emphasising the disparities faced by women from different backgrounds. Roy's narrative challenges the conventional notions of femininity and masculinity, exposing the inherent biases and injustices prevalent in Indian society.

5. Discussion

The novel traces the life of Anjum and her journey in challenging the misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding hijras. Anjum, born as the fourth child to a family that had longed for a son, was initially named Aftab. Her parents had waited six years for a son, but upon her birth, it became evident that Anjum possessed both male and female genitalia, leading her parents to understand that she was intersex. Roy explores the psychological and social tensions that arise from Anjum's identity, highlighting the deep-rooted binary gender norms in Indian society (Bose, 2020). Anjum's mother, Jahanara Begum, was horrified by this revelation. "Is it possible for a mother to be terrified of her

own baby?" (Roy, 7).

Struggling with guilt and fearing societal rejection, Jahanara even contemplated suicide, unable to comprehend a child who defied the strict binary categories of "man" and "woman" that shaped her worldview. Roy writes, "In Urdu, the only language she knew, all things, not just living things but all things—carpets, clothes, books, pens, musical instruments—had a gender. Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman. Everything except her baby" (8). As Bose (2020) notes, Roy's portrayal of Anjum's gender identity reflects the broader social tensions around gender nonconformity in South Asia, where hijras occupy a complex social position, both marginalized and revered within certain cultural frameworks (Reddy, 2005). Roy's narrative challenges these fixed gender norms, advocating for a more fluid and inclusive understanding of identity (Gopal, 2019).

Anjum's parents, particularly Jahanara Begum, were consumed by a desperate hope, clinging to the belief that Anjum's intersexuality was a temporary condition—a fear likely intensified by the harsh societal judgment they anticipated. Roy highlights how Indian society's entrenched preference for sons over daughters contributes to this anxiety, as gender hierarchies are deeply rooted in patriarchal structures (Menon, 2012; Bose, 2020). However, the truth about Anjum's anatomy could not be hidden forever. When it was revealed to Mulaqat Ali, Anjum's father, his initial reaction was one of deep disappointment: "It took him a while to get over the shock" (Roy 16). His disappointment stemmed from the years he had spent longing for a son, a longing that Anjum's birth did not fulfil in his eyes. The news was so unsettling that Mulaqat Ali initially wished to sever ties with his child: "He chose to sever all ties with his son" (Roy, 25). This reaction underscores how Indian parents, driven by a preference for male children, often fail to accept children who deviate from rigid gender norms (Reddy, 2005; Gopal, 2019).

Roy critiques this narrow-minded attitude through the forced attempts to "correct" Anjum's body via surgery—a decision that reflects both their limited understanding of intersexuality and the underlying prejudice they harbored. Ironically, despite living in a supposedly modern era, Mulaqat Ali clung to the archaic notion that a medical solution could "cure" Anjum. As Roy writes, "He embarked on the cultural project of inculcating manliness in Aftab" (Roy 17). This forced conformity reveals the violent imposition of patriarchal norms on individuals whose identities defy binary gender expectations (Bose, 2020). Roy exposes how misogyny and transphobia operate within seemingly "normal" heterosexual families, reinforcing harmful societal norms that dictate what it means to be "man" or "woman."

The narrative surrounding Anjum's birth exposes the deeply ingrained patriarchal preference for sons in Indian society. Unlike parents who celebrate the arrival of a daughter, Jahanara Begum and Mulaqat Ali represent a common trend – a relentless pursuit of a male child. Their relentless procreation only ceased with the arrival of Aftab, their supposed son. However, the revelation of Anjum's intersexuality shatters their joy, transforming their longed-for son into a source of disappointment. This intense focus on a male heir exposes the narrow-mindedness towards girls and transgender individuals, highlighting a societal desire to erase such identities. Further emphasising this prejudice is their attempt to force Anjum into the role of a son, "He embarked on the cultural project of inculcating manliness in Aftab" (Roy, 17).   Despite these efforts, genuine affection for Anjum seems absent, overshadowed by the disappointment of their unfulfilled desire. Roy masterfully utilises these characters to illustrate the prevalence of misogyny and transphobia within the social fabric. Anjum's struggle extends beyond societal expectations and parental disapproval.   Internally, she grapples with self-discovery, yearning to embrace her true identity amidst the chaos of societal norms and parental pressure. The line "Aftab found himself wanting to be her" (Roy, 17) poignantly captures Anjum's deep desire to acknowledge and live authentically as she feels on the inside, a stark contrast to the life her parents and society try to force upon her.

Pramod K. Nayar, in his book Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory, observes that "sexuality, strangely, has been seen as a category that exists only in the form of the man-woman relationship" (185). This limited understanding reflects the deeply entrenched binary thinking within Indian society, where any gender identity or relationship that transcends this framework is perceived as deviant or abnormal. Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness explores the complex hierarchies within the hijra community, highlighting the distinctions between "born hijras" and "made hijras" (Roy, 2017). Hermaphrodites like Anjum, who are born with both male and female genitalia, are classified as "born hijras," while those who undergo emasculation to become hijras are considered "made hijras" (Hossain, 2012). This distinction underscores the layered nature of identity and acceptance within the hijra community itself, where biological and performed identities are differently valued (Dutta, 2013).

Anjum's identity as a "born hijra" reflects the additional psychological strain faced by intersex individuals and sexual minorities in India. Roy's portrayal of Anjum's struggle reflects the complex negotiation between identity and societal acceptance. As Hossain (2012) argues, the marginalization of hijras stems from a historical and cultural legacy of both reverence and exclusion, where hijras have been mythologized as sacred figures yet socially ostracized in daily life. Roy's depiction of Anjum's search for belonging mirrors this paradox, highlighting how sexual minorities are caught between symbolic acceptance and real-life discrimination (Puri, 2016). Roy's narrative ultimately challenges the rigid structures of gender and sexuality, urging for a more expansive and inclusive understanding of identity (Banerjee, 2020).

Anjum's life unfolds as a fascinating exploration of identity and societal expectations. Though assigned male at birth and viewed as a boy by her parents and society, Anjum's internal world resonated with a feminine identity. This creates a unique situation – a homosexual consciousness trapped within a male body. Despite this physical reality, Anjum possessed a strong maternal desire, evident in her longing to have a child. Unable to conceive biologically, Anjum embraces motherhood through adoption, finding Zainab abandoned on the steps of Jama Masjid. "Zainab was Anjum's only love" (30). Roy masterfully weaves a narrative where fate seems to intervene – a child seemingly

left for Anjum to discover and nurture. This act of finding Zainab, and Anjum's subsequent role as "Mummy", underscores the power of Roy's storytelling. She infuses Anjum's life with a sense of connection and love, defying the isolation often faced by ostracised communities.

Roy does not shy away from depicting the harsh realities of prejudice, highlighting how Anjum faces discrimination not only as a transgender woman but also as a Muslim. The intersection of gender and religion creates a double burden for Anjum, as she navigates both transphobia and Islamophobia. As Puar (2007) argues, individuals whose identities intersect across marginalized categories, such as gender, sexuality, and religion, experience compounded forms of exclusion and violence. The irony of a transgender woman seeking refuge near a mosque underscores the tension between religious doctrine and queer identity. In Islamic discourse, transgender identity is often regarded as "haram" (forbidden), reinforcing the alienation experienced by individuals like Anjum (Kugle, 2014). At the same time, Hindu nationalists view Anjum's Muslim identity as a threat to their vision of a homogenous Hindu state,a reflection of the broader ethno-religious conflict in contemporary India (Jaffrelot, 2017).

This dual marginalization highlights the complex challenges faced by those who defy rigid societal and religious expectations. Roy's narrative confronts religious hatred but also introduces a moment of redemption through the discovery of Zainab, a young orphan whom Anjum adopts. This act of motherhood challenges traditional religious and gender norms, suggesting the possibility of alternative family structures and healing through compassion rather than conformity (Bacchetta, 2013). Anjum's relationship with Zainab underscores Roy's broader argument: that love and acceptance can emerge even in the most fractured and hostile social environments.

The novel paints the Khwabgah as a sanctuary, a refuge for ostracised individuals like Anjum. This haven, introduced through Ustad Kulsoom Bi, a transgender mentor, offers a stark contrast to the rejection Anjum has faced. Ustad Kulsoom Bi presides over this haven in Old Delhi, a space where music, dance, and poetry become tools for self-expression and empowerment for the transgender community. More importantly, the Khwabgah provides a sense of belonging, a stark contrast to the isolation Anjum has endured.

The text beautifully captures this newfound sense of acceptance with the line "It was the only place in his world where he felt the air made way for her" (Roy, 19). The Khwabgah transcends a mere physical space; it becomes a symbol of resilience and creativity. In the face of societal rejection and violence, these marginalised groups have carved out their communities, fostering traditions and support systems that defy the hostility of the outside world. Here, individuals ostracised for their identities find solace and acceptance. The Khwabgah is not merely a shelter; it's a testament to the strength and self-reliance of these communities. External do not govern this haven but thrive on the mutual support and care provided by the transgender women who call it home. The Identities of individuals here are proudly worn on their shoulders and not hidden in fear of being rejected or oppressed. They are not passive recipients of charity but active participants in building a space of acceptance and empowerment. Recent scholarship has begun to emphasise the importance of such affective and autonomous spaces in queer and transgender narratives in South Asia, highlighting how they serve as critical sites of resistance and identity-making (Datta, 2021; Pillai, 2022). As Patel (2023) argues, such community formations actively challenge the heteronormative and casteist structures that otherwise marginalise queer lives in India.

In a society where the transgender community faces systemic marginalization and discrimination, the Khwabgah emerges as a radical space of refuge and empowerment. It functions as a site of alternative belonging, where individuals rejected by mainstream society can reclaim their identities and establish new forms of kinship. As Hossain (2012) argues, hijra spaces like the Khwabgah represent not only physical sanctuaries but also sites of resistance, where marginalized individuals can construct alternative identities and social structures. Roy captures this transformation poignantly when she writes, "Once she became a permanent resident of the Khwabgah, Anjum was finally able to dress in the clothes she longed to wear" (Roy, 26). This suggests that the Khwabgah offers not just physical safety but also the psychological freedom to embrace one's true self, away from the gaze of normative society.

The Khwabgah, however, is not merely a shelter—it is also a site of resistance and social subversion. Roy extends this theme through Anjum's Jannat Guest House, which she builds on a graveyard. This act is symbolically charged, representing Anjum's defiance of societal norms and her vision of a more inclusive social order. Roy describes it as a "mehfil"—a gathering space for "everybody and nobody"—emphasizing its democratic ethos. As Dutta and Roy (2014) argue, hijra spaces often function as counter-hegemonic sites where marginalized identities can challenge the dominant structures of power. Anjum's act of establishing Jannat is thus a political gesture—an assertion of agency in a world that denies the legitimacy of transgender lives (Puri, 2016). Roy's narrative positions the Khwabgah and Jannat Guest House as metaphors for a reimagined democracy—one that transcends religious, gender, and social boundaries to create a more inclusive and pluralistic society (Banerjee, 2020).

The graveyard in Indian literature often transcends its literal meaning, becoming a potent symbol of impermanence, suffering, and resilience. Rabindranath Tagore employs the graveyard as a metaphor for life's transience and the inevitability of death, depicting it as a tranquil space for contemplation (Bhattacharya, 2011). Similarly, Mulk Raj Anand, in The Big Heart, uses the graveyard to underscore the harsh realities of poverty and social marginalization. Anand's graveyard becomes a grim symbol of despair, highlighting the structural inequalities faced by marginalized communities (Chatterjee, 2012). Arundhati Roy's approach to the graveyard in The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is more complex, blending these traditional motifs with contemporary political and social commentary. Located in the heart of Delhi, near the old city, the graveyard becomes a final resting place for victims of political violence, communal riots, and state oppression. These burials reflect the exclusion and marginalization of certain communities, reinforcing Roy's critique of state and societal failures (Khilnani, 2017).

Roy's graveyard, however, is not solely a site of death and loss—it also emerges as a space for resilience and healing. As Mondal (2017)

argues, Roy constructs the graveyard as a site of memory and resistance, where the marginalized reclaim agency through communal mourning and remembrance. Anjum's transformation of the graveyard into Jannat Guest House, an inclusive space for outcasts and misfits, symbolizes this shift from death to rebirth. By creating a sanctuary in a space marked by violence and grief, Anjum reimagines the graveyard as a site of healing and communal strength (Gopal, 2019). Roy thus employs the graveyard as a metaphor for political and personal renewal, suggesting that even in the aftermath of destruction, there exists the possibility of rebuilding and resistance (Roy, 2017). The graveyard, therefore, becomes not only a space for mourning but also for solidarity and regeneration, where the displaced and marginalized can find solace and a sense of belonging.

Serena Nanda's influential work, Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India, provides a detailed examination of the hierarchical structure within the Hijra community. Nanda highlights the importance of the guru-disciple relationship, noting that having a guru is essential for social acceptance and respect within the community. As Nanda observes, "to belong to the hijra community you must have a guru; otherwise, you will have no respect" (46). This hierarchical dependence is reflected in Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, where Anjum's position within the hijra community is influenced by her relationships with other hijras and her integration into their social framework (Roy, 2017). Nanda's analysis aligns with Roy's depiction of the hijra community's reliance on traditional structures of authority and mentorship (Nanda, 1990). Salima's narrative in the novel illustrates the vulnerability that hijras face when they lose the protection of their gurus, exposing them to social and economic instability.

The hierarchical structure within the hijra community extends beyond personal relationships into economic survival and social organisation. As Hall (2015) notes, hijras are oppressed at multiple levels, with factors such as caste, class, and gender identity intersecting to create a unique form of marginalisation. Nanda underscores the complexity of this oppression, emphasising how initiation into the hijra community is regulated by the guru-disciple dynamic: "every hijra has a guru, and initiation into the community occurs only under the sponsorship of a guru" (43).

Roy reflects this dynamic in Anjum's story, highlighting how her position within the Khwabgah—an informal hijra household—depends on the recognition and support of the community's elders. Economic survival within the hijra community is often precarious, with many hijras relying on begging, prostitution, and performing at weddings and childbirth ceremonies for their income (Agrawal, 2019). Roy hints at Anjum's involvement in this informal economy when the narrator refers to her skill as a "pleasure giver," a subtle nod to the socio-economic vulnerability that hijras face within Indian society (Roy, 2017). Through Anjum's narrative, Roy exposes the complex intersections of gender, sexuality, and economic survival within the hijra community, underscoring the resilience and solidarity that emerges despite systemic marginalisation.

In contrast to the ostracization faced by the marginalised, Jannat Guest House emerges as a sanctuary of acceptance and belonging. This self-proclaimed "paradise" represents more than a physical refuge, it becomes a symbolic space where the boundaries between life and death, and between the socially accepted and the rejected, dissolve. Roy underscores this transformation with the line, "Gradually Jannat Guest House became a hub for Hijras" (Roy 68). As Poonam Arora (2021) argues, spaces like Jannat Guest House function as "counter-hegemonic zones" where marginalised identities can reclaim agency and reconstruct their social realities. Roy crafts Jannat Guest House as a bridge between two disparate worlds, the ostracised hijras and the so-called "normal" society, challenging the very definition of normalcy and inclusion (Arora, 2021). This reflects Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopias, which he defines as spaces of "otherness" where social norms are inverted or suspended (Foucault, 1986). Jannat Guest House functions as a heterotopia, where Anjum and other residents construct a self-sustaining, alternative reality that rejects the exclusionary structures of mainstream society.

Roy's narrative further complicates the notion of acceptance by highlighting the illusory nature of societal norms. Anjum, with her "patched together body" (Roy 70), a metaphor for her layered marginalisation as a hijra, a Muslim, and a woman, embarks on a quiet yet radical mission to create a more inclusive society. According to Kavita Daiya (2020), Roy's work reflects a broader postcolonial feminist critique, where the creation of alternative spaces becomes a form of resistance against patriarchal and heteronormative structures. Jannat Guest House, built on the symbolic site of a graveyard, stands as a testament to the resilience of those deemed socially unworthy. Through this space, Roy envisions a world where marginalised communities are not just accommodated but actively shape the social fabric. This utopian defiance underscores the limitations of mainstream acceptance, reinforcing the transformative potential of creating self-governed spaces of belonging and solidarity.

Central to this exploration is the plight of the marginalised, those ostracised by societal norms and a ruthless state apparatus. Among these marginalised communities are the Kondh tribe, indigenous people who have inhabited the hills and forests of Central India for centuries. Roy paints a vivid picture of the Kondh way of life, one steeped in reverence for nature. Their land, their hills, and the very resources they draw sustenance from are held in sacred regard. Generational traditions and practices are not merely cultural relics; they are cornerstones of a philosophy of sustainable living. The Kondh have thrived alongside the forests, taking what they need with respect and ensuring the ecosystem's continued health. This harmonious relationship stands in stark contrast to the rapacious greed Roy exposes. The narrative unflinchingly reveals the devastating consequences of unregulated mining operations, the environmental plunder that scars the earth and disrupts the delicate ecological balance. The Kondh, along with other marginalised communities, become unwitting victims of this greed, their ancestral lands threatened, their way of life in jeopardy.

Moreover, Roy's exploration of gender and sexuality in the Broken Republic extends beyond mere representation to a deeper analysis of the struggles and agency of women in the face of systemic oppression. She portrays women who defy societal expectations, resist oppressive

structures, and strive for autonomy and empowerment. Through her characters, Roy highlights the resilience and courage of women who navigate a world that seeks to confine and silence them. Roy throws light on the systematic and organised resistance that women undertook.

"The Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan (KAMS) campaigned against the Adivasi traditions of forced marriage and abduction, against the custom of making menstruating women live outside the village in a hut in the forest, against bigamy and domestic violence" (Roy 66). Women have been the victims of oppression, harassment and sexual crimes, and Roy argues that it is the coming together of identities that invites a whole new experience that women in the region go through. It is vastly different from the experience women face, as the women in the region have multiple layers of oppression- caste, class, gender, political and social oppression within the patriarchal tribal communities.

Roy's Broken Republic serves as a powerful critique of gender dynamics, power relations, and the ongoing struggle for equality and freedom in a deeply unequal society. Through her narrative, Roy forces readers to confront the harsh realities of gender-based violence and the oppressive structures of patriarchy in contemporary India. The brutal targeting of women by state-sponsored forces, including the Salwa Judum, reflects the deeply entrenched gendered nature of political violence. The brutal targeting of women—particularly Adivasi and Dalit women—by state-sponsored forces such as the Salwa Judum, exposes the gendered nature of political violence and militarised governance (Sundar, 2021; Choudhury, 2022). Roy's critique aligns with recent feminist scholarship that highlights how state violence disproportionately affects marginalised women, rendering their suffering invisible within dominant nationalist and security discourses (Dasgupta, 2023).

Roy writes, "A lot of the rape and bestial sexual mutilation was directed at members of the KAMS" (Roy 67), highlighting how even resistance organisations like KAMS, formed to empower women and challenge systemic violence, were met with brutal suppression. According to Mallika Kaur (2019), state-backed militias often employ sexual violence as a tool of war, not only to punish but to humiliate and assert dominance over marginalised communities (Kaur, 27).

Roy does not merely document these atrocities; she interrogates the structural forces that enable them. The Salwa Judum, described as a "people's militia" that was "supported and armed by the government," left a devastating trail of destruction: "50,000 people in roadside police camps" (Roy 9). The militia's gendered violence was not incidental, it was systemic and intentional. While men were tortured and killed, women were subjected to sexual violence before being murdered. Roy exposes how this gendered pattern of violence reflects patriarchal perceptions of women as both the symbolic bearers of community honour and vulnerable targets in conflict zones. As Nandini Sundar (2016) argues, the Salwa Judum's violence represents a deliberate strategy to fracture indigenous communities, using sexual violence as a weapon of war and a means of asserting state dominance (Sundar 78).

While Broken Republic is a powerful exposé of the systemic violence inflicted upon tribal communities, it can be critiqued for occasionally romanticising resistance movements without fully interrogating their internal gender dynamics. Although Roy highlights the active role of women in Maoist struggles, her narrative often overlooks the patriarchal undercurrents within these movements themselves. Scholars like Banerjee (2013) and Bhatia and Gopalakrishnan (2019) have noted that women in insurgent groups are not immune to exploitation, facing issues like lack of reproductive healthcare, internal surveillance, and unequal treatment even within supposedly egalitarian revolutionary structures. Roy's essays tend to present a unified front of resistance, which, while politically compelling, may flatten the lived contradictions and dissenting voices among women within these spaces. By positioning the tribal woman primarily as a figure of ecological and political resistance, Roy risks essentialising her identity, inadvertently reducing complex individuals into symbols of purity or victimhood.

Moreover, Roy's portrayal underscores the complicity of state institutions in these crimes. The sexual exploitation of women by security forces is presented as systemic and institutionalised: "Their sexual exploitation of women was just an added perk in a hardship posting" (Roy, 48). Roy's critique aligns with Rachna Dhingra's (2020) analysis of state violence, which identifies sexual violence as an "instrument of terror" employed to reinforce hierarchical power structures and silence dissent (Dhingra, 52). By highlighting the gendered dimensions of state violence, Roy exposes the intersection of patriarchy and political oppression, challenging the dominant narratives of national security and order that justify such atrocities.

The role of women in the Maoist guerrilla movement, as depicted in Broken Republic, is complex and multifaceted. Women are portrayed as active participants in the armed struggle, fighting alongside men for political power and gender equality. However, the harsh realities of gendered violence and exploitation within and outside the movement are starkly illustrated. Roy writes, "The Judum came to Korseel, her village, and killed three people by drowning them in a stream. Ajitha watched them rape six women and shoot a man in his throat" (Roy 68). This incident underscores the differential punishment meted out based on gender—men were murdered, while women were subjected to sexual violence and torture. As Kunnath (2020) notes, sexual violence is frequently used as a weapon of war to terrorise and humiliate women, reinforcing patriarchal power structures even within revolutionary movements (Kunnath, 145).

Despite the Maoists' ideological commitment to gender equality, the lived experiences of women cadres reveal internal contradictions. Women in insurgent movements often face discrimination, exploitation, and a lack of adequate support for health issues, including the absence of menstrual leave and the constant psychological strain of remaining combat-ready (Banerjee, 2013, p. 210).

Roy's narrative reflects these tensions, highlighting the emotional and physical toll on female cadres, some of whom resort to suicide due to mistreatment or suspicion within the movement. Similarly, Bhatia and Gopalakrishnan (2019) argue that the internal power dynamics within revolutionary movements often mirror the same patriarchal structures they seek to dismantle, creating an environment where female fighters must navigate both external conflict and internal oppression (Bhatia and Gopalakrishnan, 78). Through this portrayal, Roy underscores the

paradox of women's participation in revolutionary movements—fighting for liberation while being constrained by persistent gender-based inequalities.

The patriarchal society in which they live has stripped them of access to basic healthcare, leading to serious medical issues in the long run. "Malnutrition during puberty causes a woman's menstrual cycle to disappear, or never appear in the first place" (Roy, 79). Roy accuses the state of creating the political and social climate in the region, which is forcing women to live in inhabitable conditions and having to bear medical issues throughout. Roy strongly condemns the state for how common it is for women in the region to get harassed and for the culprit to go unpunished without even a judicial trial or a basic police enquiry- "Women who have been raped are in police custody. The rapists give speeches in the bazaar" (Roy, 27).

In contrast to what is expected of the police, which is to take action, investigate and arrest the culprits, the police harass the tribal people who are victims in the first place. It is common for the uniformed personnel to take advantage of the economically, financially and socially backwards people living in the forest. "If the police come across her, they will kill her. They will rape her first" (Roy, 42)- Roy notes how difficult it is for a woman in the region to pursue justice after being made a victim to a sexual crime or otherwise. The oppression and harassment is both physical and mental- from displacement to refugee camps.

Traditionally excluded from warfare, Naxalite ideology allows women to take up arms and participate in combat. This act directly challenges patriarchal norms that confine women to domestic spheres. The Naxalite movement offers women opportunities for political participation and leadership roles. This empowers them to have a say in decision-making processes that directly affect their communities. By taking on traditionally male roles, women in the Red Corridor are actively dismantling expectations around femininity. They are forging new identities that extend beyond domesticity and redefine their place within the community.

6. Conclusion

Arundhati Roy employs both fiction and non-fiction in her works to challenge conventional representations of gender and sexuality in contemporary India. Through her characters and narratives, she dismantles societal expectations and patriarchal structures, advocating for agency and resistance among marginalised communities such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and religious minorities. The paper highlights Roy's use of intersectionality to portray the complex interplay of gender, sexuality, class, and caste, and her amplification of voices silenced by societal norms. It underscores Roy's commitment to representing authentic and nuanced accounts of individuals belonging to minority groups and her call for a more inclusive and equitable society that transcends restrictive norms. The paper also highlights the significance of Roy's account of socio-political issues to build a counter-narrative in acknowledging the ground reality and the dual nature of gender politics in the books.

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