



## THE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS* BY ARUNDHATI ROY: A SUBALTERN PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT:

The field of subaltern studies is interested in looking into environmental problems. As an additional thought, it considers the environment to be a marginalized problem. When used to the political objectives of post-colonial neoliberal nationalism, the term "subaltern" refers to the interconnected hegemony and exploitation of subalterns and the natural world. Many authors and activists have worked to raise public consciousness about environmental issues through their writing and activity. Women in India have a long history of leading environmental initiatives, and their efforts predate ecocriticism's establishment as a Western academic discipline. Indian English writer Arundhati Roy, an outspoken ecofeminist and advocate for the rights of marginalized people, has grown increasingly concerned about environmental degradation and the oppression of subalterns. This paper uses Arundhati Roy's most recent novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, as a case study to illustrate the non-anthropocentric perspective on nature as shown in the novel. It highlights the struggles of transgender, other women on the margins, and revolutionary women in order to expose the exploitative tendencies of an elite-dominated society. Old birds and animals are dying off because of immoral modernization, rehabilitation, and scientific technology, as the author reveals. This paper seeks to examine, from a subaltern perspective, how embracing nature might alter the gendered problems that have been institutionalized in relation to the silence of the subaltern, and other forms of non-human life.

**Key words:** - *Subaltern Studies, Environment, Exploitation, Post-colonial Neoliberal Nationalism, etc.*

### INTRODUCTION :

At the end of the 1970s, a specific group of English and Indian historians had a conversation about subaltern topics that eventually led to a proposal to start a new journal in India called Subaltern Studies. Instead, three volumes of articles titled Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society were published by Oxford University Press in New Delhi. These began appearing annually in 1982, and due to their popularity, Ranajit Guha edited three additional volumes over the next five years. Ranajit Guha and his team of eight co-authors produced thirty-four of forty-seven pieces in six volumes of Subaltern Studies and fifteen other publications in the field before he stepped down as editor in 1989. In 1993, this interdisciplinary organization of South Asian scholars directed by Ranajit Guha, which he recalls as being "an

assortment of marginalized academics," had gained enough international clout to serve as an inspiration for a Latin American Subaltern Studies Group.

What was intended by "Subaltern Studies" in the eighties, and nineties is not the same as what is understood by the term now. Because of the rapid evolution of our collective mind, it is no longer possible to establish definitive causal relationships between specific actions of reading and writing. The internal dynamics of the Subaltern Studies project have shifted, albeit to what extent is unclear; this is because subaltern topics have been recreated in different ways both within and beyond the project. It is not enough to follow the influence of professors and students or to conjecture that reducing ideas have spread across the globe as news found on the internet when considering the historical context of subalternity.

When it comes to issues of individualism, self-awareness, and colonialism, they find themselves on opposite sides. Correctly, they point out that historians working outside the project are more likely to place subalterns in dynamic contexts involving economic, political, environmental, technological, and social history, and to view colonialism as a complex, shifting package of historical forces rather than a static organization. Hybrid research, which draws on multiple disciplines, is now the norm in Subaltern Studies and is used by many writers. The project itself is still innovative, flexible, and open to change. Subalternity is a movable feast with muddled tracks flowing in a variety of directions due to the effects of dispersal and consolidation, migration, and assimilation.

#### DISCUSSION :

Roy's writings have reliably bolstered the genre of eco-literature. Her unwavering focus and the unwavering spirit of her works have always been on the world's environmental concerns. The novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* has an epigraph that says "To, The Unconsoled." The epigraph, in which the author recognizes the existence of individuals who are unconsoled, echoes the writer's tone. Even if the readers don't know who these folks are who can't be comforted, their presence is definitely strong. The novel's prologue reveals the author's preferences and main preoccupations as the story develops. The prologue's visual description is very lyrical and introspective.

Roy begins *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* with these lines:

Armies of flying foxes unhinge from the Banyan trees in the ancient cemetery during the magic hour when the sun has set but the light has not yet completely faded, and float over the city like smoke. As soon as the bats fly off, the crows will return. The sparrows that vanished and the ancient white-backed vultures that vanished can't be replaced, and the noise of their return

can't cover up the emptiness they left. Diclofenac toxicity was the cause of death for the vultures. Before getting into the negative impacts of human avarice, Roy begins optimistically by describing twilight's "golden hour." The ones who want "more ice cream, butterscotch-crunch, nutty-buddy, and chocolate chip" and "more mango milkshake" are people. (Roy). The author elaborates on the sad truth of how human behavior is damaging the environment and threatening the lives of birds and animals that are just as much a member of the living community in our world. This idea is throughout the whole novel.

The author then shifts his or her attention to other parts of the metropolis. Delhi, the capital of India, serves as the backdrop for the tale. Roy's unparalleled creative creativity is on full display in her panoramic portrayal of the metropolis. Around her, the metropolis extends for kilometers, she realizes. Dozing but not sleeping, even at this hour, is a thousand-year-old sorceress. Under the yellow sodium haze, grey flyovers snaked out of her Medusa head and tangled and untangled. Head to toe, head to toe, looping into the distance, sleeping homeless people lined their high, narrow walkways. (Roy, 96) A lady with "parchment skin," "wrinkle," "arthritic joint," "varicose veins," "withered tits," "aching feet," and "stiff old hips" represents Delhi, a city steeped in history (Roy,96). After India's independence, the narrative jumps forward in time to the current decade. Investors and the governing political elite have grand plans to transform the historic city into the "... super capital of the world's favorite new superpower" (Roy,96).

It is clear from the novel that the desire to modernize India has set in, and that as a result, Delhi is being made to go through changes that align with the mercenary goals of those in power. The market economy has been propelled

by the boom, which has resulted in innovative and enticing new retail techniques. The Indian people have embraced the store as a cultural institution. As a result, globalization has invaded the nation, leading to widespread deforestation and the subsequent growth of skyscrapers and industries as well as the increased popularity of processed foods, canned foods, and mineral water, and the building of enormous dams throughout India. Roy notes that people have "bottled rivers and sold them in supermarkets, canned fish, and transformed mountains into sparkling missiles." She also notes that people have built skyscrapers and steel factories where woods once stood. Cities were illuminated by huge dams like Christmas trees. There was joy all around (Roy,98). Businesses and political leaders in India ignored the negative effects of deforestation, processed food, and mineral water on the country's ecosystem and population health.

The rivers decreased in size, the trees died, and the environment around us was easily damaged. One other noteworthy event was the exclusion of superfluous individuals. Away from the city's bright lights and commercials, rural areas were slowly being abandoned. Likewise, urban areas. The narrator claims, "Millions of people were being transferred, but nobody knew where to" (Roy,98). Cities were being cleared of their destitute populations so that the wealthy might come in. The poor had no choice but to leave the cities. Many people's lives were in jeopardy because of these terrible rules. In contrast, the oblivious elite continued their pretended happiness. The narrator makes the observation that despite this, supermarkets and convenience stores were groaning under the weight of their food supplies. Plenty of books may be found at the stores. There were so many pairs of shoes that the stores couldn't contain them all. And those individuals remarked to those people, "You don't have to travel overseas for shopping

any longer." Now you may buy goods imported from other countries. (Roy,99)

Syed Wahaj Mohsin and Shaista Taskeen, in their paper "*Environmental Concerns in Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness: A Critical Study*," draw attention to this key aspect. Large dams are another way in which the ecosystem is harmed, as pointed out by Roy in the book. Huge dams were like Christmas trees, lighting up the city, says the narrator. It was a joyous occasion for everybody. The biological river system was destroyed, aquatic life was injured, and farmers were left with insufficient water because of these dams, despite their promises of producing tremendous energy, and water for human use, agriculture, and navigation. The 'Narmada Bachao Andolan,' led by activists Medha Patkar and Baba Amte, was sparked by the harmful effects of dams. As an Andolan member, Roy took part in its planning and execution (movement). (Mohsin and Taskeen) Hence Roy, who is involved in a number of social movements, includes events with comparable themes in her fiction. *The Ministry Utmost of Happiness* tells the story of the Bhopal gas disaster. The environmental and social problems that have plagued the nation since the gas spill are highlighted, as is the survivors' fight for recompense. The story elaborates on the suffocating pollution that has befallen the nation's capital city of Delhi, which has caused widespread destruction. The wide gulf that exists between the wealthy and everyone else is addressed. Where the evicted had been "re-settled," on the city's industrial outskirts, the air was toxic and the water was poisoned because of the kilometers of brilliant marsh firmly packed with garbage and colorful plastic bags. Mosquitoes flew in swarms from the lush green ponds(Roy,100).

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the river is described in a manner similar to this. Tilo is walking along the river when she stops on a

bridge to watch a guy sail a circular raft made out of old mineral-water bottles and plastic jerrycans across the thick, sluggish, dirty river. A herd of buffalo slid contentedly into the murky depths. Pavement sellers peddled watermelons and cucumbers that looked like they came straight out of a supermarket, but were really cultivated in a chemical factory. (Roy, 234). By writing, "When the Jhelum swelled and broke its banks, the city vanished," Roy paints a realistic image of the destruction wreaked by the river Jhelum in Kashmir during the floods. Entire neighborhoods drowned. There was a complete collapse of government institutions, including military bases, torture facilities, hospitals, courts, and police stations. The former market areas were now home to houseboats. (Roy, 264).

#### CONCLUSION :

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is teeming with people who can't be comforted. Arundhati Roy, a well-known modern author, and environmentalist use the persuasive force of her writing to investigate pressing issues confronting modern society and the natural world. In each of her books, she paints a vivid picture of environmental devastation and other problems facing the planet. Her books effectively shake people out of their apathetic sleep and into a sense of environmental responsibility. Human greed is the root cause of the systemic brutality that is environmental destruction. Anyone who has benefited in any way from the natural world has a responsibility to do all they can to stop the current downward spiral of environmental destruction. Through her works, Arundhati Roy strives for the common good. She deftly works eco-consciousness into the fabric of her story. The author uses a subaltern perspective and an obtuse narrative to try to convey the state of the planet. Consequently, a growing body of thought informed by logic and experience is need to be developed to enhance environmental quality. This study widens the

field of literary ecology by exploring a broader set of topics and issues. Moreover, the purpose of this report is to get the lobotomized government apparatus to pay attention to the problems of subalterns and ecology that Roy has identified. She motivates readers to learn more about environmental and subaltern issues and find solutions. Roy has an enthusiastic goal of making Earth a better place to live.

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