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# METAPHOR AS THE POWER OF THE UNSAID IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

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We certify that, as the jury, we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science /Master of Arts/ the Doctor of Philosophy/Proficiency in Art.

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# ABSTRACT

METAPHOR AS THE POWER OF THE UNSAID IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S
*THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

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The purpose of my thesis is to sketch out all the metaphors present in the novel that shed light on the distinction between humanity and the lack thereof. Through many characters and what they and their journeys metaphorically symbolise, my dissertation attempts to shed light on the characteristic elements that starkly distinguish the politically animalistic from the socially humane. This humanity is ironically portrayed through the animals. It is also explored through journalism and the biased and unforgiving eye of the camera.

**keywords:** metaphor, symbol, minorities, transgender, animals, humanity

# ÖZ

ARUNDHATİ ROY'UN *EN YÜKSEK MUTLULUK BAKANLİĞİ'NDA*

METAFOR VE SÖYLENMEYENLERİN GÜCÜ

Bhutta, Rida Khalid

İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Yüksek Lisans Programı

Danışman: Prof. Dr. Francesca Cauchi

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Tezimin amacı, romanda bulunan ve insanlık ile insanlık eksikliği arasındaki ayrıma ışık tutan tüm metaforların taslağını çizmektir. Birçok karakter ve onların ve yolculuklarının metaforik olarak sembolize ettikleri şey aracılığıyla, tezim politik olarak hayvani olanı sosyal olarak insancıl olandan keskin bir şekilde ayıran karakteristik unsurlara ışık tutmaya çalışıyor. Bu insanlık ironik bir şekilde hayvanlar aracılığıyla tasvir edilmiştir. Aynı zamanda gazetecilik ve kameranın önyargılı ve affetmeyen gözü aracılığıyla da araştırılıyor.

**Ahahtar sözcükler**: metafor, sembol, azınlıklar, transseksüel, hayvanlar, insanlık, insanlık dışı

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This dissertation is a shout in the dark against all obstacles faced and will forever remain a celebration of efforts made by my thesis advisor, Dr. Francesca Cauchi, my parents, husband and even my child who is yet to be born!

Rida Khalid Bhutta

Izmir 2022

## TEXT OF OATH

I declare and honestly confirm that my study, titled “METAPHOR AS THE POWER OF THE UNSAID IN ARUNDHATI ROY’S *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*” and presented as a Master’s/PhD Thesis, has been written without applying to any assistance inconsistent with scientific ethics and traditions. I declare, to the best of my knowledge and belief, that all content and ideas drawn directly or indirectly from external sources are indicated in the text and listed in the list of references.

Rida Khalid Bhutta

April, 17th 2022

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# CHAPTER 1
# INTRODUCTION

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, published in 2017, was a novel twenty years in the making. It neatly blurs the class divisions in post-partition India through vivid distinct narratives of a transgender named Anjum and an architect turned human rights activist for Kashmir, Tilo. The two find their place in the *Duniya* (world) by redefining their identities and the two narratives merge at the very end of the novel in an abandoned Delhi cemetery. The reader is introduced to several characters that intertwine with the aforementioned characters, whether it is the barbaric Indian Army Officers or freedom fighters. The novel includes a diverse cast where not only humans play a pivotal role in establishing and deciding the course of the narrative, but also many secondary and tertiary characters including animals, insects, and the personified eye of the camera. These last function in the novel as metaphors, which are the focus of this dissertation.

## 1.1 Roy's Political Activism

Born in Kerala, India in the early 1960's and graduated with a degree in architecture, Arundhati Roy wrote her first novel in 1997. Titled *The God of Small Things*, it won a Booker Prize and sold millions of copies worldwide. The novel was considered immensely controversial in conservative India as it depicted a love affair between a Hindu *Achoot* (untouchable) and a Syrian Christian. Despite the phenomenal success

of her first novel, Roy would not write another for twenty years. Instead, Roy's focus shifted to activism for causes that impacted the world as a political state. She began by publishing various essays that not just documented but also made her opinions on India’s environmental policies and its nuclear weapons program publicly known. Her first non-fiction book, *The Cost of Living*, published in 1999, contains two essays. The first essay, ‘The Greater Common Good’, was on the Sardar Sarovar Dam project on the Narmada River. She argued against the dam, pointing out that its construction would place the lives of those who lived around it in severe jeopardy. Her essay was among the first that gave legal insight into the court’s decision in favour of the construction of the dam, garnering global interest. The second essay, ‘The End of Imagination’, was an attack on India’s nuclear tests which took place in May 1998. An extremely provocative essay, it led to brutal attacks on the Indian government. Her most notable essays, however, were on the 9/11 attacks and on the Kashmir divide – an issue that is still unresolved and that the two parts of the subcontinent are still fighting over. In 2010 she was arrested for her controversial opinions on Kashmir’s Independence, views which later appeared in her 2011 book *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom*. After being released, she continued to make inflammatory statements about Kashmir, claiming it to never have been a part of India, which resulted in her being labelled an anti-nationalist and being asked to quit the state because of her opinions. Kashmir and its right to independence is the backdrop to her second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, which is the text I shall be discussing in this dissertation.

In 2020, three years after publishing *Ministry*, Roy released a collection of essays titled "Azadi", translated freedom. In these essays she criticises many issues pertaining to the Indian government and in particular what she sees as its fascism. She uses the onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic as a medium that played a pivotal

role in exposing to the entire world the inadequacies of the Indian government. She mocks the mediocre or complete lack of a health structure and how this lack resulted in a clear discrimination between how the poor and the rich were treated during the spread of the coronavirus. Not only does she comment on this divide existing in India, but speaks of its existence across the globe and calling America out for not supporting its poor. Despite repeatedly facing threats and backlash for what many critics believe is her "biased" political opinion, Roy continues to speak out in order to bring to the surface several ignored and deliberately denied issues in the world and to expose the hardships faced by the poor and the dispossessed in society. The same concerns are voiced in her second novel through the outcast Anjum and through Dr Bhartiya's newsletter, both discussed in this dissertation.

### 1.2 *Ministry's* Mixed Reception

In an article entitled "The (In)Significance of Small Things", Robbie B.H. Goh echoes the approach taken in my dissertation: addressing elements that otherwise appear to be small and irrelevant to the grander narrative. He approaches the narrative as a post 9-11 novel which shares "with other novels in that genre, the thematic and structural evocation of a traumatically fragmented and suspicion-filled global order" (Goh, 2021). Just as my dissertation sheds light on the injustices presented in a subtle and metaphorical manner, Goh believes that "Roy's novel depicts the evils of caste, patriarchy, and other forms of social oppression; the plight of the poor, Dalits, and backward caste communities; the corruption of the police; and the brutality of the police state" (Goh, 2021). He also reiterates the importance of the different forms of storytelling Roy cleverly uses in *Ministry*, calling it a "practice of typographic play" and stating that this form of writing "is itself a kind of repository of textual fragments that collectively paint a picture of human suffering

and oppression in Kashmir" (Goh, 2021). Further validating the idea that despite being heavily centred on all things political, Roy's form of writing in *Ministry* demonstrates a shift to "major symbols…fictionalizing national/regional history", which captures the later novel's much broader geo-political sweep" (Goh, 2021). He believes that unlike her previous writings, this particular novel is "an excess of small heterogeneous bits of information" (Goh, 2021) which inevitably tie together to create a grander narrative that goes on to represent far more significant things than what it overtly claims to do.

Romy Rajan, in an article entitled "Where Old Birds Go to Die: Spaces of Precarity in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*", discusses the idea of uncertainty as presented in the novel. He shows how "traditions converge in the novel in the space of a graveyard, where Anjum provides other characters temporary refuge and a model of dissidence that defies conventional parameters of spatial organization legible to the state" (Rajan, 2021). She also states that the novel complicates the uncertainty that comes with the concept of liberalization in a state that was once colonized, keeping focus on the idea of "surveillance" (Rajan, 2021). This dissertation also addresses the concept of surveillance and shows how Roy conveys this idea metaphorically through kites and ravens. Rajan focuses her attention on the abandoned child adopted by one of the novel's protagonists and refers to her as a "metaphor for precarity … a capacious model of inventive and experimental resistance" that takes place in a graveyard (Rajan, 2021). In parallel with this dissertation, Rajan also reads the graveyard itself as a metaphor stating that it "recasts the narrative of official Indian history, the celebration of which had obscured those at the margins of this history" (Rajan, 2021).

Indonesian Journal published an article addressing the "Political and Gender Issues in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*" written by Danish Suleman,

Abdul Halim Mohamed and Md. Firoj Ahmmed. The writers believe the narrative to be an intertwining of tales between Anjum and Tilo in opposition, saying that "in contrast to Anjum's tale which unfolds the internal conflicts of a transgender, Tilo's life exposes a world of external conflict" (Danish Suleman, 2020). The Anjum narrative, they argue, presents a distinct striving for identity as represented by the two warring genders and that Anjum's "escape from the bonds of family life, the private to the public sphere as an activist mark the emergence of her social and political identity" (Danish Suleman, 2020). In this dissertation, it is argued that Anjum's transition from the private to the public and from conflict to equilibrium is figured in the novel as a metaphorical movement from death to life. As Suleman et al argue, the two protagonists Tilo and Anjum "detach and develop their own social networks and social structures which establish heterotopias and struggle to survive the normative frameworks of the societies" (Danish Suleman, 2020). These oppressive normative frameworks are explored in the first chapter of this dissertation.

Parul Sehgal writes in her article "Arundhati Roy's Fascinating Mess" that through the narrative of a *Hijra* (transgender individual) Roy comments on the suppression of the Muslim minorities in Gujrat. Sehgal further asserts that each character is nothing but an embodiment of the struggles and triumphs of the minorities of India and that "there are no victims in this book" (Sehgal, 2017). My reading of the novel, however, disagrees with this idea and explores how characters like Gul and the country to which he belongs, Kashmir, are two of the most poignant victims in the narrative. Other characters, such as Anjum, one of the so-called *Hijra* noted above, and the many Kashmiris tortured and murdered by Indian Army Major Amrit Singh, are also viewed as victims. But whereas Anjum takes charge of her own narrative to evolve as a stronger, more independent character, Kashmir and its people are still

victims today. Although Sehgal's main argument is that *Ministry* is a commemoration, celebration and denunciation of all that is political within India, she also indicates that there is romance, kinship and resistance in the novel – not of the conventional kind but a "compendium of alternatives." Although my reading of the novel does not refer directly to the romance between Tilo and Musa, I view their romance as conventional as Musa's kinship for his country – a kinship that is central to Chapter 2 of my dissertation. I also disagree with Sehgal that the novel's lack of a third person point of view results in Roy's failure to humanise the characters amidst all that is political. As will be clear in the following chapters of my analysis, the first person narratives are extremely effective in eliciting an emotional response out of the reader.

In a review subtitled "a patchwork of narratives", Alex Clark claims that the novel "is a curious beast: baggy, bewilderingly overpopulated with characters, frequently achronological, written in an often careless and haphazard style and yet capable of breathtakingly composed and powerful interludes" (Clark, 2017). His main argument centres on the idea that Roy's book is a testament to the notion that what is personal is political and what is political is personal – an idea that is brought out in my reading of the novel. He highlights how the book walks through India and Kashmir to point out the brutalities of war between Pakistan and India fought over the contested land. He also notes that "as a campaigner for Kashmiri independence, Roy is more than alive to its complexities, as one of her more detached characters, an Indian diplomat". It is through this character, Dasgupta, one of the novel's many first person narrators, that Roy dispassionately explores these complexities and juxtaposes Dasgupta's account of the Kashmiri issue with that of Musa, a Kashmiri freedom fighter and Tilo's lover. While Clark is correct in arguing that the patchwork of narratives is overpopulated, I try to show in my reading of the text that certain voices

prevail among others, bringing the personal journey narrated by these voices closer to the reader. I also show how the Kashmir issue is humanised through these more prominent characters, allowing global readers to empathise with the journey of each individual mentioned.

Similar to Clark, Michiko Kakutani asserts in his book review that the novel, unlike her previous one, lacks all cohesion and the art of competent story telling. Although he admires the two female protagonists in the book (Anjum and Tilo), he contends that the fragmentation of the smaller narratives makes the writing “labored and portentous,” dismissing Roy’s anecdotal approach and congested character development as “poorly stage-managed detours from the compelling stories of Roy’s two heroines” (Kakutani, 2017). I will show, however, that through a minor character Gul, Roy brings out the novel’s human dimension and, like Dr Bhartiya’s newsletter, powerfully represents the everyday tragedies that befall a myriad of people who are overlooked or ignored. I believe this to be the reason why Roy overpopulates her novel with lots of minor and seemingly insignificant characters. Overall, Kakutani sees the novel as a fictional manifestation of Roy’s own political journey and her dedication to being an activist for the Kashmir resistance movement. He acknowledges that *Ministry* has moments of heartfelt intensity, but claims that it is less focused on the personal than on “the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a nation.” As noted above, my analysis of the novel shows how Roy uses metaphor to bring out the personal and the individual. Nonetheless, Kakutani affirms what I try to accomplish in my reading, that there are “metaphors of sorts for the subcontinent’s own divisions over history and religion” (Kakutani, 2017). In the first chapter of my critique, the first of these metaphors is explored in the form of Anjum's division as male and female, reflecting the subcontinent’s own division.

In Anita Felicelli's review of the novel, she writes that it is "the kind of book that makes you feel like you've lived several times over" (Felicelli, 2017). Unlike the aforementioned book reviewers, Falicelli states that in the novel "everything that needs to be said, has been." She calls the novel a polyphonic protest – one that creates and heeds several voices and is "an unsettling, artistic cry against injustice". Felicelli's article reflects the claims I make that while the novel is "at times messy and unwieldy and hard to control … it mirrors the chaotic identity of India itself … identity is at the heart" of the novel. The first chapter of my study is an exploration of identity and marginalization as experienced by the first character introduced at the start of the novel. As Felicelli observes, "Anjum is neither man nor woman nor, exactly, a *Hijra*," but as I demonstrate in my first chapter, she is more than just a metaphor for "the chaotic identity of India itself."

Similarly, Ron Charles writes in his Washington Post article that the novel is "a tale that cradles the world's most fragile people even while it assaults the subcontinent's most brutal villains" (Charles, 2017). In a review that highly commends Roy's storytelling abilities, Charles appreciates the way in which she breaks the novel down into two distinct parts, focusing on Anjum in the first and Kashmir in the second, calling it an ambitious attempt to capture the lives of the minorities and bring them to the forefront cohesively. Although he shares the belief of most critics that Roy sometimes sacrifices "coherence in favor of her story's hurtling movement", he still affirms that the two halves neatly come together despite the chaos, a view that is reflected in my study. He also contends that the narrative "captures a world full of secret lives and cloistered sanctuaries where no one can exist for long outside the factional hatred consuming India" and that despite all the voices, *Ministry* "will leave you awed by the heat of its anger and the depth of its compassion". This sentiment is explored in my critique of the novel's metaphors of life and death, and of insects

juxtaposed with humans. These metaphors are devices through which the novel instils a strong sense of compassion in the reader through its subtle comments on a contemporary India that functions and thrives on hatred for the minorities.

In another article, Joan Acocella states that Roy’s narrative “is about India, the polity, during the past half century or so, and its griefs are national” (Acocella, 2017). She echoes the other reviewers in maintaining that the story is more of a reflection of Roy’s own political journey as an activist. By relaying the novel as a more contemporary one despite the time it is set in, Roy makes it far more relevant and relatable for the Western audience. The novel, according to this article, is a step by step exploration of the several political issues that pertain to India through the very sensitive eye of a minority constantly under surveillance. Acocella writes that “once Roy leaves Anjum and goes out into the great world you see what she learned in her twenty years of activism. And above all in Kashmir, where most of the latter part of the book takes place, we are shown horror after horror” (Acocella, 2017). In my reading of the novel, I show how this horror is revealed through metaphors of insects and animals satirically symbolising the dirt of the political world. Acocella also points to the autobiographical dimension of the novel, calling it extremely personal for Roy as the child of a Syrian Christian woman and a Hindu drunkard.

### 1.3 Methodology

This dissertation explores the use of some distinct metaphors that demonstrate the immensity of pathos present within the novel. The metaphors implicitly used in the narrative are closely examined to show how they add a powerful humanistic dimension to the narrative, steering it clear from its otherwise explicitly political voice. Through these metaphors, my dissertation argues that while the novel reads overtly as a political one, serving as an advocate not just for Kashmir but for all those

who lost their lives fighting for Kashmir’s freedom, on closer inspection it is embedded with metaphors that make the narrative an extremely relatable and humanistic one.

The second chapter deals with the metaphor of death and rebirth as seen through the character of Anjum who was born as a hermaphrodite. Anjum’s body is considered as the medium through which the metaphor plays out. She is never fully able to ‘kill’ her male or female side and becomes a metaphorical reflection of the in-between, an individual being constantly born and reborn as one or other of the two genders within her. The chapter also shows how at the end of the novel the death and rebirth metaphor merges with literal death and rebirth in a Delhi graveyard. Here, where the people from the world of norms, conventions and fixed boundaries are buried, Anjum finds a life of freedom both from gender constructs and expectations. The chapter ends with a brief look at how Roy uses Anjum’s inner struggle between the male and female as a metaphor for the political division of the subcontinent and the post-partition Indo-Pakistan war.

The third chapter deals with another pervasive metaphor that subtly continues through every section of the narrative. It examines the metaphor of entrapment, represented in the novel through different types of birds, and delves into the idea of innocence and bestiality as represented through the juxtaposition between a pet rooster and a murderous character nicknamed “otter.” Animals are read as metaphors and symbols of savagery and bestiality on the one hand and lost humanity on the other. The helpless are depicted as prey and the ones given authority as predators. For example, Roy indirectly comments on the Indian Army and their evil potency by calling them vultures. It will also be seen how birds, animals and insects are used by Roy to reflect the innocence of marginalized victims, such as the sacrificial goats that

Anjum's adopted daughter saves from ritual slaughter every year during the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha.

The fourth chapter examines what is considered to be Roy's voice itself represented through the symbolic presence of media and journalists. This chapter explores how media, news reporting, journalism and activism is used as a clever ploy to bring to light the way in which the marginalised, the socially unacceptable, and the religious and racial outcasts of society are constantly treated in India and how that treatment is ignored so as to maintain a facade that only ever benefits those in power. This chapter applies the vernacular metaphor of the "media circus" to Roy's representation in the novel of the ways in which the world of news and publication works in a political India and divided Kashmir. The idea of truth and falsehood is closely examined and the lack of integrity in news reporting is interpreted as the 'main act' in the media circus where everyone reports only what they have been paid to report and what they believe the audience wants to hear. This chapter further reveals the pathos present in the narrative by demonstrating how Roy depicts those who have the power to have their message heard and a platform accessible to the masses lack any understanding or empathy for those masses.

In the fifth chapter, I delve deeper into the historical treatment of Muslim minorities in India. I explore the relevance and increasing significance of the colour saffron and how it has evolved as a symbol of fear and sectarian cleansing of Muslim minorities residing in the Hindu majority country. The chapter begins by sketching a historical framework to establish the longevity of violence in India that has often been incited by the Prime Minister in power. In the second section, I take a brief look at the current state of affairs for Muslims living in the country and, in particular, at the recent phenomenon of "saffronization" – a Hindu nationalist agenda that seeks to purify India of all those who are "non-Hindu" through violent means. In the third

section, I explain the political and sacred symbolism the colour saffron and show how it has come to mean various things for various sects residing within the country. The chapter ends by identifying the ways in which the hypocrisy of those who pledge allegiance to this sacred colour comes into play in the novel, a hypocrisy that cloaks itself under the façade of purification and cleansing.

# CHAPTER 2
# METAPHORICAL DEATH AND REBIRTH OF GENDER

A predominant metaphor in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, is death. This chapter deals with the idea of death and rebirth in light of gender. The narrator introduces the reader to gender as both finely defined and highly problematic for the outcasts of society who are born without the conventional distinctions of man and woman. This chapter will show how metaphorical death plays a pivotal role for one of the novel's main characters, Anjum, by enabling that character to dissolve boundaries necessary for survival in a world that is intolerant towards those +who do not fit the confines of a conventional and identifiable gender. Through an in-depth textual analysis, it will be seen how the metaphor of death and rebirth first represents what Anjum sees as the necessity of the death of one gender for the rebirth of another, but then how at the end of the novel the metaphor merges with literal death and rebirth in a Delhi graveyard to reflect Anjum's realisation that it is only through the death of both genders and in being neither that she can become fully free.

## 2.1 Behind the Walled City

Within the literal boundaries of Lahore's Walled City, a young individual named Aftab is born a boy. The Walled City of Lahore (Delhi, pre-partition) is infamous throughout the subcontinent for its concubine culture and houses in an area often referred to as the "red light district." It was in the late 1990's and early 2000's that the area was seen in separation from its "walled" history and given credit as a

historical and architectural site for locals and tourists. However, for many years both before and after the 1947 division of the subcontinent into Pakistan and India, the Walled City of Lahore has been home to many living a menial life and confined almost entirely to that locality. Roy draws a stark paradox by depicting the journey of her characters as one of breaking free from their existential confines even though they are shown as residing within a part of a city that is literally walled.

From the outset, the boundaries of Aftab's gender are hazy. He is introduced to the reader as a hermaphrodite: a boy with both male and female reproductive parts. Born to a typically conventional family, Aftab is taken by his mother, Jahanara, to a shrine to beg for mercy from the Almighty so that her son may be cured of what she sees as a punishment. Aftab's sexual indeterminacy is concealed by his scared and scarred mother, who out of religious pressure and indoctrination struggles to hide her first son's physiological "flaws" in order to prevent metaphorical death by castration in the form of social ostracisation. This struggle within the mother indicates her desperation to somehow "kill" the gender within her son and marks the start of a journey to choke and smother all femininity within her son. Jahanara's struggles begin from the moment she discovers female genitalia tucked into her son:

> her first reaction was to feel her heart contract and her bones turn to ash. Her second reaction was to take another look to make sure she was not mistaken. Her third reaction was to recoil from what she had created. Her fourth reaction was to contemplate killing herself and her child (Roy, 2017, p. 8). (say more)

Jahanara "waited for his girl-part to heal" and meanwhile treated him like she would an ordinary boy, sending him to a "madrassa for boys" (Roy, 2017, p. 11). The whispered prayers, regular consultations with Hazrat Sarmad at the shrine, and Jahanara's constant supervision of her son can be seen as a slow but insidious

poisoning of her son’s female gender in the hope of killing it. It can also be seen as an authorial comment on the cultural prejudice in South Asian culture towards girl babies. Female children are traditionally seen as liabilities and are still expected to play a mostly passive and docile role in 21st century Asia. This cultural fact is also symbolized by the presence of the female in Aftab, which renders the male in him both insufficient and an obstacle to it ever fully evolving into a dominant, full-bodied male personality.

Mulakat Hakim, a herbal doctor and Aftab’s father, had initially been kept in the dark regarding the dual sex of his son, largely on account of Jahanara having “managed to put off his circumcision for some years with a series of inventive excuses” (Roy, 2017, p. 12). But when he is eventually and inevitably informed, he expects his son to undergo the rigours of modern medicine and technology and experience the death of his gender the medical way: Aftab’s father “was sure that there was a simple medical solution to their son’s problem” (Roy, 2017, p. 16). In much the same way, Aftab’s dual sex could also have been kept concealed his entire life, but, as is customary for a Muslim boy, he had to undergo circumcision, a process that if delayed would have led to more questions and raised eyebrows by the father and other members of the society. Despite being a man of poetry and spiritual faith, Mulakat Ali desperately seeks all possible “cures” for his son’s female part. Aftab is taken to see a ‘sexologist’ and is declared to be a hermaphrodite. This designation not only defied the law of boundaries, walls and distinctions that the people around him had grown accustomed to and were afraid to go beyond, it was also tainted by the notion that the coexistence of the two sexes was not only a perversion, but a perverse form of blasphemy.

Aftab is deemed to be the epitome of both perplexity and indefinite possibility in addition to being seen as a threat by conventional members of the Muslim

community. As Dr. Nabi explains, "Aftab was not, medically speaking, a Hijra [a term commonly used to describe a transvestite] – a female trapped in a male body – although for practical purposes that word could be used" (Roy, 2017, p. 16). In other words, Aftab did not fit into the comfortable separation of man and woman either culturally or physiologically, which further hints at the discomfort not only in his body but in the people in his immediate surroundings who know about it. The suggested treatment is to "seal the girl-part" in order to prevent its natural growth, although Dr. Nabi admits that the "problem was not merely superficial" (Roy, 2017, p. 17). Read sub-textually, Dr Nabi's comment implies that while for Aftab's family and community the female gender within him was principally a societal threat, within Aftab himself the problem was simultaneously societal and intrinsically existential.

In order to become an acceptable member of society, Aftab undergoes several treatments encouraged and orchestrated by his mother, Jahanara, which serve to reveal facets of his personality that are being smothered under religious beliefs and societal fear. Aftab is put through treatments that are both physiologically and psychologically invasive in order to fully demarcate the boundaries that label him as "male". One doctor "could prescribe pills too", but "he could not guarantee complete success" (Roy, 2017, p. 17). These various forms of "treatment" are features that are termed 'fitrat' (Urdu for 'nature') in the novel and Jahanara fears that while the treatments may succeed in stifling the female in her son, since the gender imposes a nature within him too, the medical process would never be completely successful, nor could it ever guarantee the death of the female within him.

Aftab is thus seen as both indeterminate and unpredictable. He could reveal the female traits of his personality at any moment, despite undergoing the invasive treatments to kill off these traits and despite being guided to embrace the masculine. This is seen in his approach to the universe he lives in. On the first occasion he

comes across another more developed hermaphrodite, Aftab is seen “wanting to be her” (Roy, 2017, p. 17). Once the awareness takes hold, the lines are further blurred for him when he enters his teenage years. After chasing down the hermaphrodite in a street, Aftab discovers that the male and female distinctions given to him by his family merely exist outside of him. He realises that it is the community in which he lives that expects him to behave in a masculine manner and that the notions and expectations set by society are not a true representation of how he feels. This epiphany makes him see that neither the enforced medical treatments nor his parents’ attempt to keep him hidden at home would ever be able to guarantee the death of the audacious and unlikely woman he felt he was and wanted to be. Despite being dressed up and raised as a boy, he admires not the women in his community, but the “tall, slim-hipped woman wearing bright lipstick, gold high heels and a shiny, green satin shalwar kameez buying bangles” (Roy, 2017, p. 18). This attraction expresses the innate tendency of his nature to resurface despite the pills and the treatments designed to kill what his family feared as perverse tendencies.

Not only do Aftab’s innate tendencies become a matter of concern to those around him, but they also indicate that he is not attracted to “regular” women, which would be a relief to all around him, as well as a source of pride among his former doctors. Instead, Aftab is attracted to a specific kin: to those who would not normally be seen or even allowed to walk the streets of their community unless contained within a community demarcated as a Hijra community. These inter-gender tendencies appear to justify his family’s fears and their determination to ensure that only one gender lives within him. It also confirms their fear of how ‘Hijra’s’ are treated in the society: no ‘purely’ female individual would ever be ridiculed or belittled in the way that a Hijra is. And as a hermaphrodite rather than a Hijra, Aftab represents a threatening concoction of the two. But for Aftab, the Hijra women did not appear ridiculous. On

the contrary, he aspired to embrace precisely those tendencies that promised comfort in dressing up as a woman who was clearly no "ordinary woman." He knew that "no ordinary woman would have been permitted to sashay down the streets" (Roy, 2017, p. 18) in the way the transgender women he had grown to admire were able to do. He also knew that the woman he followed "could dress as she dresses and walk the way she does only because she wasn't a woman" (Roy, 2017, p. 19), in the same way that Aftab was not just a woman. It is this complexity of being neither a man nor a woman that gives the protagonist a liminal or in-between quality that suggests the possibility of the death of one gender and the birth of another, but also the death of both genders and, in being neither, become fully free.

### 2.2 The Khwabgah

At the age of 14 Aftab discovers the Khwabgah, meaning House of Dreams. Both ironic and not ironic, the name House of Dreams signified both its status as a brothel and the freedom of its residents to be whom they wanted to be without being mocked or abused. It is in this establishment that the Hijra woman whom Aftab admired and followed lives. Behind the blue door of the Khwabgah, Aftab felt, was a world of possibility, a place where he could dress the way he longed to dress and escape from the world's imperative to suppress and stifle the female in him. He had felt this imperative as an expression of parental love and protection from a society that rejects hermaphrodites, but also as a cruel rejection by his peers of whom he was. Ironically, it was Aftab's discovery of the Khwabgah's *blue* door that would provide a refuge from the metaphorical dying he had been experiencing for years and save him from killing the 'fitrat' of being born with a girl-part. It would also, however, be the place where his internal war begins and where the 'fitrat' of the man surfaces. As one of the Hijras of the Khwabgah confides to him, even "the most masculine person in the

Khwabgah … menstruate[s]" (Roy, 2017, p. 21), a discovery that for Aftab comes along with his growing masculinity and the realization that the woman in him could no longer be suppressed.

It is at the age of 15 that Aftab becomes the type of boy his family always feared he would become. He begins to pluck his "bushy eyebrows into thin, asymmetrical crescents with a pair of home-made tweezers that looked more like tongs." But then, almost as if his body was rebelling against the eyebrow plucking,

> He developed an Adam's apple that bobbed up and down. He longed to tear it out of his throat. Next came the unkindest betrayal of all - the thing he could do nothing about, his voice broke. A deep, powerful man's voce appeared in place of his sweet, high voice. He stopped singing … once music forsook Aftab he was left with no reason to continue living in what most ordinary people thought of as the real world – and Hijras called *Duniya*, the World. (Roy, 2017, p. 24)

For the Hijras, Duniya represented an alien world in which they were neither accepted nor welcome, so when Aftab loses his falsetto voice and with it his one joy in life he decides to leave the Duniya behind him. He runs away from his "home" and moves into the Khwabgah, where, for the first time in his life, he feels reborn as someone whole and wholesome:

> it was the only place in the world where he felt the air made way for him … like an old school friend making room for him on a classroom bench. He entered that ordinary, broken-down home as though he were walking through the gates of Paradise. (Roy, 2017, p. 20)

He was no longer either a boy or a girl, nor was he a boy with a wish to dress up and behave like a girl; he was simply a boy-girl.

In the House of Dreams, the conventional distinctions no longer applied: Aftab could be whom he wanted to be without the constant need either to explain his gender or to kill the one suggested by his general appearance. On his first night in the Khwabgah, Aftab dances to "Pyar kiya to darna kya?" (why fear when you've loved) and officially becomes Anjum (Roy, 2017, p. 19). On the following evening, after an initiation ceremony in which he is presented with a green *dupatta* (a traditional long scarf worn by women) and informed of the Khwabgah rules and rituals, Anjum becomes the person he had wanted to be for so many years – a dazzling Hijra woman. His pronoun becomes "her" and "she" and Anjum's journey of self-discovery begins.

On the night of her 18th birthday party, still dressed in a vivid red sari (the first sari she had ever worn), Anjum "awoke distressed to find that her sexual pleasure had expressed itself into her beautiful new garment like a man's" (Roy, 2017, p. 27) – an indication of always being within and without the two genders, unable to conform to either. The war that should have ended with Aftab becoming Anjum begins again along different strategic lines. Despite Anjum finally embracing herself, Aftab continues to fight for survival at the most fundamental physiological level. It is then that her struggle to smother Aftab begins. She chooses to put her body through the same process that her parents had put her through, only this time it was to ensure the complete birth and development of Anjum. She undergoes surgery to "remove her male parts and try to enhance her vagina" and takes "pills that would un-deepen her voice and help develop her breasts" (Roy, 2017, p. 28), but neither method is entirely successful and Anjum's desire to kill off the last traces of Aftab proves futile. Throughout this journey, Anjum slowly crumbles in her search for a gender that she

can fit into and her gradual deterioration is reflected in the narrative description of the Khwabgah house (*haveli*):

> this house, this household, has an unbroken history that is as old as this broken city. These peeling walls, this leaking roof, this sunny courtyard – all this was once beautiful. These floors were covered with carpets that came straight from Isafahan, the ceilings were decorated with mirrors. (Roy, 2017, p. 49)

Although Anjum had become the type of woman she had always wanted to become back when she was a young boy, she felt unfulfilled. Just like the Hijra women who sashayed down the street and whom Aftab had so admired, Anjum became an object of admiration, a woman whom the foreigners at the Red Fort wanted to photograph. She represented to the outside world the intersection between man and woman, common and uncommon, known and unknown, admired and loathed, us and them, but to her it was a deadlock between body and soul, comfort and discomfort. Although Ustad Kulsoom Bi, the head of the Khwabgah had assured her that "In the Khwabgah, Holy Souls trapped in the wrong bodies are liberated" (Roy, 2017, p. 32), Anjum's liberation is never fully accomplished. Both in the Duniya and the Khwabgah, she remains a trapped soul stranded between Aftab and Anjum. She discovers that the pronoun "she" has no more meaning to her than the pronoun "he". Nor does the name Anjum reflect her identity any more accurately than the name Aftab had done. She was never an Aftab and now connects less and less to Anjum.

After 30 years in the Khwabgah, Anjum announces her desire to return to the Duniya. For a number of years, she had been feeling a growing sense of displacement and a lack of belonging within the Khwabgah. This sense of dislocation was caused by a new generation of Hijra which diminished Anjum's former glory as

the Khwabgah's most sought after, photographed, and written about Hijra, the dynamic jewel of the place and by Anjum's discovery a few years earlier of an abandoned 3-year-old girl at the foot of a mosque. She names the child Zainab and immediately adopts her. Anjum teaches herself to "childproof" stories so that they would not make Zainab cry. This process of understanding and shaping a new life that had come into her world reflects Anjum's own need to shape for herself a new life. Before reading to Zainab, "every hint of adversity and unhappiness was required to be excised from Anjum's stories. In order to please Zainab, Anjum began to rewrite a simpler, happier life for herself. The rewriting in turn began to make Anjum a simpler, happier person" (Roy, 2017, p. 34). The jealousies that had once troubled her in the Khwabgah with the incoming new generation of hermaphrodites became irrelevant and she begins to focus on becoming a mother to Zainab. The whole question of gender had suddenly become irrelevant to her. She "had come full circle and wanted to return to the Duniya and live an ordinary life. She wanted to be a mother" (Roy, 2017, p. 30).

By rejecting both the Duniya and the Khwabgah and embracing the conventional gendered role of motherhood, Anjum signals the death of the gender conflict within her and the start of a new journey to find a place where neither gender is of any importance. That is why, when leaving the Khwabgah, she

> packed her finery – her satin ghararas and sequined saris, her jhumkas, anklets and glass bangles – into tin trunks. She made herself two Pathan suits, one pigeon grey and one mud brown; she bought a second-hand plastic anorak and a pair of men's shoes that she wore without socks … She left without saying where she was going. (Roy, 2017, p. 57)

In fact, she did not know where she was going, except that it would be a place where the binaries of male and female, saree and suit, were a dead language.

## 2.3 The Graveyard

Shortly after leaving the Khwabgah, Anjum finds a graveyard that will metaphorically become her final “resting” place and “residence.” This “unprepossessing” graveyard that houses the “unclaimed dead” (Roy, 2017, p. 58) symbolizes Anjum’s final metaphorical death and rebirth. It is a place where she is no longer possessed either by the Duniya or the Khwabgah, nor does anyone have any claim over her. Having despaired of ever belonging anywhere, Anjum had gone there to die. Instead it becomes the place where she is reborn, where she finally belongs to nobody but herself and can lay to rest the two genders that had been tearing her apart. No longer a battlefield between the two genders, Anjum comes to represent a metaphorical bridge between man and woman, the accepted and the shunned, the living present and the dead past.

When Anjum first arrives at the graveyard, she has just been rejected by her adopted daughter Zainab and her neglected physical appearance mirrors her feelings of rejection:

> She stopped grooming herself, stopped dyeing her hair. It grew dead white from the roots, and suddenly, halfway down her head, turned jet black, making her look, well … striped. Facial hair, which she had once dreaded more than almost anything else, appeared on her chin and cheeks like a glimmer of frost. (Roy, 2017, p. 63)

Time had transformed her into a metaphor of her dead past, the stubble on her chin reminding her of the man she had spent years trying to bury. But it is in this literal graveyard that the living Anjum finally finds a place where she can peacefully reflect upon her dead past, bury it, and live her dying days quietly and uncomplicatedly as a

whole person. No longer living the in-between life of the Hijra in the Khwabgah, she is finally able to let the "tide of grief and fear subside" (Roy, 2017, p. 66). The graveyard allows her to be herself without worrying about how others will judge her: she had the "license to behave as she wishes without worrying that she would have to pay for her sins in her next life" (Roy, 2017, p. 64).

Unlike the Duniya and the Khwabgah, the graveyard "became a home; a place of predictable, reassuring sorrow - awful, but reliable" (Roy, 2017, p. 66). Here she no longer felt threatened and when the municipality workers questioned her, she simply told them that that "she wasn't living in the graveyard, she was dying in it — and for this she didn't need permission from the municipality" (Roy, 2017, p. 67). The graveyard also became a home for other outcasts like herself. Anjum builds makeshift rooms next to each of the graves for each of her outcast guests and names the graveyard the "Jannat Guest House." As the 'landlord' of a place where those who had once judged her lay dead in their graves and where the living outcasts could find a refuge, Anjum begins to regain control of the life she had lost in the Duniya and the Khwabgah. She now had both living and dead "visitors" and "tenants" who never questioned her gender, nor her decision to live in a graveyard surrounded by the dead. She was a woman when she needed to be, and the "man of the house for the moment[s]" when it was required (Roy, 2017, p.71). She established a funeral service business, "the one clear criterion [of which] was that Jannat Funeral Services would only bury those whom the graveyards and imams of the Duniya had rejected" (Roy, 2017, p. 80). All those Hijras who had strayed from the Khwabgah, men who were blind, religious scholars who had no place to go, women on the run for being political activists and daughters abandoned on the steps of various mosques, all of these were welcome in Anjum's guest house for the living and the dead.

It is at the graveyard that Zainab also returns to Anjum and begins to watch her adoptive mother in high spirits among the dead spirits of the Duniya and fulfilling her lifelong goal of feeling like "I was born to be a mother" (Roy, 2017, p. 83). Anjum's life becomes one of the impossibly possible. She develops an environment where an unlikely family resides and grows. She is both matriarch and patriarch of a place where everything is real and unreal, alive and dead, joyful and mournful. She says that "this place where we live, where we have made our home, is the place of falling people. Here there is no haqeeqat (reality) […] even *we* aren't real. We don't really exist" (Roy, 2017, p. 84). Thus, what began as a place where "Anjum waited to die" (Roy, 2017, p. 92) becomes at the end of the novel a place of fulfilment. Anjum is a mother, a landlord, a man of the house, a friend, a confidante, a hermaphrodite, roles which embrace the gender norms she had taken years to murder.

### 2.4 Coda: Aftab-Anjum as Political Metaphor

The conflict between the male and the female in Anjum, both as gender and biology, is used by Roy to reflect the political division of the subcontinent and the post-partition Indo-Pakistan war. When Anjum is still Aftab, he is told by Nimmo, a 14-year-old runaway and the first hermaphrodite that Aftab befriends at the Khwabgah, "The riot is *inside* us. The war is *inside* us. Indo-Pak is *inside* us. It will never settle down. It *can't*" (Roy, 2017, p. 18). The prepubescent Aftab who sees the Khwabgah as a paradise is unable to understand, but when he turns fourteen and starts to grow "tall and muscular. And hairy" (Roy, 2017, p. 18), he is hit by the truth of Nimmo's words. Through Anjum's futile attempts to fully reconcile her male and the female parts, Roy seeks to show the way in which the subcontinent, once considered a

cohesive whole, becomes two broken parts that never fully heal after being painfully severed – a process symbolically presented through Anjum's medical surgery to remove her male genitalia and retain her female genitalia. More broadly, in Anjum's struggle to find her place in the world, the reader is given a glimpse into the wider struggle suffered by Indians and Pakistanis seeking to find their place in a post-partition reality.

# CHAPTER 3
# THE BESTIALITY OF HUMANS

Whereas the previous chapter dealt with the metaphor of the Khwabgah in reference to gender, this chapter deals with a far more prominent yet subtler metaphor in the novel. This is Roy's use of animals to draw comparisons between humans and animals. Subtly and ironically, the narrative portrays several characters either in juxtaposition to certain animals or as a reflection of their potency in the metaphorical wildlife that constitutes the Duniya. As the narrative unfolds, it focuses on the Kashmiri resistance fighters struggling to salvage their dignity and ultimately secure their freedom from the vicious and brutal Indian forces. While animals are a ubiquitous metaphorical presence throughout the narrative, they gain particular prominence when four characters, Naga, Tilo, Musa, and the extraordinarily violent Amrik Singh, are introduced to the reader midway through the narrative. This chapter explores the novel's metaphorical employment of animals to reflect either the innocence of the trapped and the marginalised or the bestiality of the ones with power. Although many animals are used in the novel as gentle metaphors for the snubbed and the downtrodden, they generally epitomize man's loss of humanity when he sinks to the savage and predatory practices of beasts and at the same time reflects the gentle presence of humanity through the use of other animals.

## 3.1 Birds: Entrapment and Freedom

From the outset, birds are associated with characters who are trapped within the social and political margins, constrained by their class, race, caste and religious

differences. The novel opens with an epigraph-type passage, but much longer than the usual epigraph, in which the theme of freedom and entrapment is conveyed through the metaphor of birds. Within this passage, Roy writes, "When bats leave the crows come home. Not all the din of their homecoming fills the silence left by the sparrows that have gone missing … not many noticed the passing of the friendly old birds" (Roy, 2017, p. 8). These lines open the novel with an image of departing bats. In many cultures bats are considered representatives of good luck and hope, whereas crows are culturally seen as harbingers of death. This suggested departure of hope and luck and the juxtaposed cacophony of the homecoming crows appears to hint at the oncoming morbidity in the narrative, especially when the sparrows go missing. And like the positive image of the bats, sparrows are generally viewed in a positive light. The arrival, departure and absence of the mentioned birds is connected in these lines to no one noticing the passing of "friendly old birds" that are often culturally seen as God's messengers bringing on either reward or punishment. Through the use of these birds at the novel's opening, Roy foreshadows the way in which she will deploy birds in the narrative as metaphors to anticipate what tragedies are to unfold within the narrative and the characters those tragedies are associated with.

In the above-mentioned epigraph, Roy goes on to describe "armies of flying foxes [that] unhinge themselves from the Banyan trees in the old graveyard and drift across the city like smoke" (Roy, 2017, p. 8). The analogy of the flying foxes departing from the Banyan trees in the graveyard and drifting smoke can also be considered an additional reference to death as in India, where cremation is a Hindu rite of passage from life to death, smoke represents the striving of souls to reach heaven and is used in the epigraph in reference to the graveyard. In contrast to the funereal smoke, the Banyan trees symbolize eternal life in the Hindu culture. These trees are also often referred to as hermit trees by the Hindus because of the tree's spiritual value. Thus,

the foxes that hinge themselves around the Banyan trees could be seen as a symbolic representation of the outcasts in the narrative who, like the hermit trees, lack social roots or a family to belong to. It can also be argued that the repetition of the word "homecoming" and the unhinging of the foxes from the trees suggest the displacement and dislocation of the characters in the novel who feel they do not belong in the *Duniya* and who find both life and an alternative familial structure in the graveyard.

Echoing the epigraph, the first chapter is titled "Where do Old Birds go to die?" and it opens with an extended metaphor that continues throughout the narrative in several ways. Anjum, the character at the centre of my second chapter, later evolves as a representation of those who are marginalised by society or gender, trapped in their bodies, their biology and social constructs. Anjum is the cumulative metaphor of those eunuchs and hermaphrodites who cannot free themselves as they are products of consequences they cannot control and who appear to be associated with the "old birds" mentioned in the epigraph. Anjum inquires: "Where do old birds go to die? Do they fall like stones from the sky? Do we stumble on their bodies in the streets? Do you not think that the All Seeing, Almighty One who put us on this Earth has made proper arrangements to take us away?" (Roy, 2017, p. 10). This passage appears to suggest that the old birds are metaphors for those who are misunderstood by the residents of the *Duniya* and who, as outcasts, seek refuge in a graveyard. The further rhetorical questions asked by Anjum in respect of the "old birds" show their tired and weary form of existence as she muses over their lack of belonging and sense of abandonment. Though she asks these questions hypothetically, the narrative itself offers the answer to the questions. At the end of the novel, the graveyard is the place where the old birds do not go to die, but, paradoxically, to find life, thereby answering the question posed by Anjum at the beginning of the novel. Words like

"fall" and "stumble" suggest the critical judgment, the disappointment and the ignorance of the *Duniya* residents towards those who are not like them, who appear to “fall like stones” out of the sky or are social pariahs that one “stumbles on” in the streets.

In contrast to the old birds, the narrative introduces the readers to kites, ravens and vultures; these are predatory birds associated with hovering and death. Roy writes how “the sky was a dark swirl of ravens and kites competing with the children, pigs and packs of dogs” (Roy, 2017, p. 114) and of “a boundless [street] in which kites wheeled, high and quiet, up in the thermals” (Roy, 2017, p. 30). Kites are repeatedly referred to as birds that watch and survey and, in the narrative, create a certain element of fear. Words such as “dark swirl,” “wheeled,” and “boundless” suggest a threatening sense of pervasive surveillance birds that is felt in the novel by those living under military rule in India. This is particularly the case in the following passage: “kites and griffons circled the thermals, drifting lazily back and forth across the Line of Control, just to mock the tiny clot of humans gathered down below” just as “the birds stopped their twittering for a while and listened” (Roy, 2017, p. 155). The words “circled”, “Line of control”, and “back and forth” suggest military surveillance, while the action of birds circling and “mocking” the “tiny clot” of people “below” can be read as a figurative representation of the relationship between the army and the civilians living under the watchful eye of the army. The same metaphor is used later in the novel: “the kites circled in the sky, supervising everything” (Roy, 2017, p. 162) and “in an upper tier, silent kites circled, curious perhaps, but inscrutable” (Roy, 2017, p. 190). Repeated use of the word “supervise” and “circled,” “above,” and “silent” clearly suggest surveillance, while the adjectives “curious” and “inscrutable” suggests something invasive and threatening to the “birds” that no longer twittered while being watched by the predatory birds. In short,

the ever-circling kites overhead can be seen as representing the Indian army's never ending supervision and scrutiny over the masses and, in predatory fashion, restrict, watch, and prey.

Later on in the narrative the phrase "broken bird" is associated with a boy who has been captured by the Indian Army and taken in for interrogation: "he stayed very still, a broken bird, half sitting, half lying, propped up on one elbow, his breath shallow, his gaze directed inward, his expression giving nothing away. He showed no curiosity about his surroundings or the people in the room" (Roy, 2017, p. 109). The phrase "broken bird" suggests a life without dreams as the bird with a broken wing can no longer soar through the sky as is its instinct. The boy can therefore be seen as an individual whose dreams have been stripped away in the prime of his life. Roy writes that "one leg of the boy's trousers was rolled up, exposing a matchstick-thin calf held together by a splint from ankle to knee. His arm was in a plaster cast and his neck was bandaged. Though his face was drawn with pain, he didn't grimace when the soldier deposited him on the floor" (Roy, 2017, p. 109). His brokenness can be read as both literal and metaphorical. He has a literal splint from his knee to his ankle and metaphorically his spirit has been broken because despite the pain, he does "not grimace at the soldier" and shows "no curiosity about his surroundings or the people in the room" (Roy, 2017, p. 109). The captive boy can be symbolically read as a representation of the broken bird, one that is injured and unable to fly and is captured. On the other hand, the boy, however broken, represents the strength of the resistance and the wisdom associated with old birds. The boy's refusal to show fear before the Army interrogators is described as "a desolate act of defiance that he had conjured up in the teeth of absolute, abject defeat. And that made it majestic" (Roy, 2017, p. 109).

### 3.2 “Spotter the Otter” Singh

In Chapter 7 of *Ministry*, the reader is introduced to Amrik Singh, a man who thrives on and is known for his uncanny ability to inflict violence on others. A major from the Indian army, Singh gains prominence as a man who tortures the members of the Kashmir resistance that are unlucky enough to fall into his brutal hands. As a senior member of the army fighting on the Indian-Kashmir border, Singh functions in the novel as a representation of extreme and unnecessary force of violence and aggression. Despite appearing as a non-threatening army officer, Singh takes it upon himself to identify and remove any threat to himself and the country and religion he belongs to. Murdering both the guilty and the innocent on a whim and without official orders, he is seen by the people of Kashmir and the Indian Army as a highly dangerous loose cannon. To understand the iniquitous nature of his character, it is important to mention that “even Amrik Singh’s accomplices … were willing to turn approvers and testify against him in court. But then one by one their bodies began to turn up. In fields, in forests, by the side of the road … he killed them all. The army and the administration had to at least pretend to do something, although they couldn’t really act against him. He knew too much and he made it clear that if he went down he would take as many people as he could down with him” (Roy, 2017, p. 87). The bodies of the people he kills “show up in forests” (Roy, 2017, p. 87), a detail which reveals how he calculates and arranges things in a way that makes it impossible to link his murders back to him personally. Ironically, his intention can be read as one to mislead officers and journalists into thinking that the murder in question could have been caused by a wild animal, which metaphorically speaking it has been. These traits earn him the name “Spotter the Otter” (Roy, 2017, p. 87) or “the killing machine” (Roy, 2017, p. 182), which is given to him by the friends and acquaintances of his victims. The reason he is called “Spotter” is due to “his uncanny

ability to spot the snake in the grass, the militant hidden among a crowd of civilians" (Roy, 2017, p. 87). His ability to deceive his victims earns him the epithet "a chameleon", a person who "could pass himself off as a Hindu, a Sikh or a Punjabi-speaking Pakistani Muslim, depending on what the operation demanded" (Roy, 2017, p. 187), never fully allowing his victims to anticipate or recognise him.

The "Spotter the Otter" metaphor is given two further twists via the character Tilo. Like Anjum, the novel's earlier female protagonist, Tilo is a woman who has left her past and family behind. Tilo's involvement with a member of the Kashmir resistance, Musa, is what brings her face to face with the Indian Army after she is arrested and tortured by them on the orders of "Otter the Spotter" Singh. After this experience, Tilo begins to gather and compile evidence against Singh, whose barbarity she witnessed firsthand. He is also notorious among all the members of the resistance as a wild animal who preys upon Kashmiri freedom fighters. The first twist of the metaphor is that just as animals mislead their predators or their prey by putting them off their scent, Tilo uses the same tactics by labelling the folders that contain detailed evidence of Singh's savage murders "Otter Pics" and "Otter kills" (Roy, 2017, p. 96). These innocent-sounding labels ensure that if any member of the Indian Army raids her apartment, he will assume that these folders are full of holiday snaps. The second twist of the metaphor relates to the fact that otters are known for being voracious predators. They thrive on consuming large quantities of food, ravenously. This instinctive ravenous hunger can be seen in "Spotter the Otter" Singh, a man who appears to be harmless, but is in fact a voracious predator feeding on Kashmiri resistance fighters and those who give them support and shelter. Tilo's isolated experience with Singh was sufficient to understand how no one could escape him once he decided their lives were unworthy of being lived. Just as otters appear harmless when found in their natural habitat but turn out to be extremely vicious, so

does Singh as a respected major in the army: “even when it was stormy and the ocean was dangerously choppy, there they were, those cheeky little bastards, floating nonchalantly on their backs, looking for all the world as though they were reading the morning papers” (Roy, 2017, p. 96).

As the plot progresses, Singh retains his position as an abuser of power who uses his army position to torture and murder Kashmiri resistance fighters and to beat his docile wife in the bedroom. Among the many he murders is Gulrez, one of Spotter’s innocent victims and a friend to Musa. Musa Yeswi is a member of the resistance who fights more actively after he loses both his wife and daughter who were watching from the balcony of their home as the Indian Army massacred innocent bystanders during a protest march. Musa is also Tilo’s former boyfriend from their university days. Like Amrik Singh, Gulrez is a character that is directly linked to the novel’s extended animal metaphor. One night, when Musa meets up with Tilo on Gulrez’s houseboat, Musa tells her how Gulrez ended up operating a tourist houseboat on the Dal Lake, safe and well hidden from the Indian Army:

> “We nearly lost him two years ago. There was a cordon-and-search operation in his village. The men were asked to come out and line up in the fields. Gul ran out to greet the soldiers, insisting that they were the Pakistani army, come to liberate them. He was singing, shouting *Jeevey! Jeevey! Pakistan!* He wanted to kiss their hands. They shot him in his thigh, beat him with rifle bullets and left him bleeding in the snow. After that incident he became hysterical, and would try to run away whenever he saw a soldier, which is of course the most dangerous thing to do.” (Roy, 2017, p. 196).

The above passage can be assessed as a way animals are hunted. Gul is left bleeding in the snow and the hysteria that follows can be seen as a sign of post-traumatic stress triggered by the sight of an army officer. The use of the word “liberate” can

also be seen as a contrast to the idea of entrapment, discussed in the previous section of this chapter. Whereas on the one hand the army was meant to represent a sense of liberation for some groups of people it was also a symbol of entrapment and oppression for others. This traumatic incident contributes to Gulrez's naturally gentle nature and his innate desire to protect those he loves. He is portrayed in the novel as a man who shares a kindred bond with vulnerable animals, a quality which will be analysed in the next section.

### 3.3 Gul and Sultan

Gulrez used to own a pet rooster called Sultan, who was killed by a dog and then eaten by Indian soldiers. We discover a little later in the novel that this is a foreshadowing of Gulrez's own death at the hands of Amrik Singh. Sultan's death epitomizes the way that empathetic humans are preyed on by bestial humans in the shape of law enforcers. To fully fathom the metaphorical relevance of Sultan in the novel, it is important to comprehend Gulrez, the man who adopted, loved and cared for Sultan before he was devoured by the military.

Gulrez, or Gul for short, is a friend to Musa, Tilo and animals. After having being captured by the Indian army, tortured, and endured several beatings for showing disrespect to the army, he is never able to fully recover. He is a harmless, traumatised individual who spends his time looking after those who have no voice: the animals. Just as at the end of the novel the graveyard was turned "into a zoo, a Noah's ark of injured animals" (Roy, 2017, p. 188), Gul spends most of his time lovingly looking after his pet rooster and any other unprotected animals that come his way. One of these vulnerable 'animals' is Tilo, a character like Gulrez who is deeply traumatized by events in her past. When she goes to Kashmir to visit Musa, she is taken to Gul's houseboat. It is there that she re-unites with Musa after many years and Gul looks

after Tilo in the same way that a mother looks after her child. He cooks for her and ensures her safety while she waits for Musa. Despite Gulrez's innocence and gentle nature, he is eventually murdered by "Spotter the Otter". When he is captured by Singh's henchmen, they find in his pocket a harlequin rabbit called Khanum, another of Gul's adopted animals.

Several fundamental questions about human nature are answered through the relationship between Gul and Sultan, a relationship that Musa recounts to Tilo on the night of their houseboat reunion and that represents the opposing ways in which the relationship between man and animal is explored in the narrative. Sultan is described as having had a natural regal charm and being indifferent towards the military rule at a time when resistance was arguably the only way to survive. Gulrez, a character who is deeply traumatized by his experience with the Indian Army, believes Sultan was doomed to die: "Arre use bewakoof ko agar yahan mintree ke saath rehna nahi aata tha, to phir woh saala is duniya mein aaya he kyuun that?" (oh if that idiot did not know how to live with the military here then why did that nincompoop come into this world?) (Roy, 2017, p. 190). The subtext of Gul's words, "a long profanity in a mixture of Kashmiri and Urdu" (Roy, 2017, p. 167), is that not putting up a fight against the Indian army and resisting them meant imminent death.

> The captain had a dog with him. A huge German shepherd, on a leash. After he finished delivering his threats and his lecture, he let the dog off the leash, saying, "Jimmy! Fetch!" Jimmy pounced on Sultan, killed him, and the soldiers took him for their dinner. Gul-kak was devastated. He cried for days, like people cry for their relatives who have been killed. For him Sultan was a relative … nothing less. And he was upset with Sultan for letting him down, for not fighting back, or escaping – almost as though he was a militant who should have known these tactics (Roy, 2017, p. 172).

The above passage reflects the kinds of relationships explored in the narrative between man and animal and between man and man. Whereas the captain's dog had been chained and trained to attack rather than roam freely, Sultan roamed freely through the village and was loved and protected by Gul who grieved over Sultan's death like one would grieve over a lost relative. The entire episode demonstrates the brutal and brutalising nature of the army reflected through the training given to the German Shepherd: just as the dog is trained to guard and attack, so too is the army. Sultan's death can thus be viewed as a metaphor for the way the Indian army trains its soldiers to kill or maim the vulnerable and the innocent, seen here in the captain's unleashing of the German shepherd to kill the rooster. In contrast to this, the relationship between Gul and Sultan of love, loyalty and dignity is similar to the kind of love and loyalty shown in Musa's determination to fight humanely for the freedom of the Kashmiri people. This humane aspect of Musa's character is also reflected through an animal. Shortly after Musa tells Tilo the story of Sultan's death, he tells her another story of how he was once beaten by soldiers and as he was lying bleeding on the floor, "A dog was staring at me. He seemed quite sympathetic" (Roy, 2017, p. 173). The quality that surfaces in Gul and Musa under different circumstances is what identifies them as loving and loyal beings.

### 3.4 The Prey and the Saved

A strong juxtaposition in the novel to the barbarity of human animals such as Amrik Singh is not just Gul's tenderness but that of another of the novel's minor characters, Zainab. Like Gul's rooster, Zainab is adopted. Her adoptive mother Anjum refers to her as the abandoned "mouse", which can be seen as another example of Roy's use of animals to symbolise the predatory and preyed aspects of humans. Zainab is raised

in the Khwabgah and her "real passion, it turned out, was animals" (Roy, 2017, p. 24), which she overzealously defends against religious rituals and their dispensability on the street. Zainab represents the empathy and softness of humans that one desires to witness in those with power, but rarely does. Her relentless attempts to protect the animals and stand up for the metaphorical underdog portray her as the symbolic "sympathetic dog" like the one that looks at Musa.

Similar to Gul and his love for the rooster, "Zainab was naturally drawn to animals" (Roy, 2017, p. 22). She "wanted to free all the half-bald, half-dead white chickens that were pressed into filthy cages and stacked on top of each other" (Roy, 2017, p. 24). The manner in which she views the animals reflects the members of the Kashmiri resistance seen by the Indian army as dispensable human beings.

> She would not listen when she was told that dogs were unclean – najis – for Muslims and should not be touched. She did not shrink from the large, bristly rats that hurried along the street she had to walk down every day; she could not seem to get used to the sight of the bundles of yellow chicken claws, sawed-off goats' trotters, the pyramids of goats' heads with their staring, blind, blue eyes and the pearly white goats' brains that shivered like jelly in big steel bowls (Roy, 2017, p. 24).

Zainab views animals as voiceless living beings incapable of fending for themselves and therefore establishes herself as an individual with protective power. This presents a stark contrast to what Amrik Singh represents as Zainab strives to free, protect and save those that everyone else around her is bent on either consuming, killing or sacrificing for one reason or another. Whether it is the chickens in a coop or street animals being mistreated, Zainab represents the idea that humans possess an innate ability to be kind, but choose not to be. She even protected her "pet" goat against ritual slaughter, even though it was a religious requirement: "[it] could have

made it into the *Guinness Book of World Records* for accomplishing an un-heard of feat (for a goat): dying of natural causes (colic) after surviving a record sixteen Bakr-eids" (Roy, 2017, p. 44). Zainab's animal instinct to protect is in complete juxtaposition to Singh's animal instinct to kill savagely.

Zainab also plays a pivotal role in the narrative's exploration of the concept of freedom. One day, having grown into a young adult, "Zainab arrives with several cages stuffed with three dozen budgerigars that had been absurdly coloured in luminous dyes" (Roy, 2017, p. 188) intending to free them. At the same time, however, she realises how freeing birds dyed in luminous colours will make them more likely to be attacked by predators. This is another symbolic reference to the members of the resistance who, having gained prominence and visibility in the eyes of the Indian Army, could be "spotted" from afar, making them easy prey. On the other hand, the futility of Zainab purchasing the budgerigars in order to set them free demonstrates how the efforts made by individuals like Zainab and Gul to protect vulnerable creatures are often thwarted by the predatory nature of other human beings.

# CHAPTER 4
# THE MEDIA CIRCUS RING

One of the most prominent voices in the narrative is Roy’s voice itself. With the narrative elements of media, news and journalists, she brings in her experience of activism and news reporting in order to expose the ways in which these elements dictate how the masses, the minorities and members of certain sects were and are treated in India. The more news reports that appear in the novel’s narrative, the more the reader is reminded of the filtered and emotive nature of the information being imparted by the media, whether through the experience of the characters or through the voice of the third person omniscient narrator. This chapter takes the colloquial metaphor of the media circus and applies it to Roy’s highly critical representation of the media in the novel. Not only is the media represented as an entity that disregards truth and facts and presents only manipulated information as the truth, it appears as a resounding media circus ring where journalists striving for maximum exposure push out very specific and heavily edited stories that resonate with their political and sectarian bias and readership. A circus can easily be understood as a place where trained animals (the subjects of the news stories) are used and manipulated by the ring masters (the news corporations) as a means of entertainment and profit. This chapter highlights how individuals like Mulaqat Ali, a character depicted as representative of all Muslim minorities in India, falls victim to this form of media exploitation.

**4.1 Fake News**

The image of newspapers and information being force-fed to the masses is introduced very early in the novel. In the brief opening chapter, we learn that Anjum "read the newspaper aloud" to the old Imam who, probably because he was old enough to recognize it for the propaganda that it was, "clearly hadn't been listening" (Roy, 2017, p. 10). Anjum's father, Mulaqat Ali, had also been an object of media interest because of his unique way of treating his patients. As a Muslim minority Hakim (pharmacist), he would often prescribe poems to his patients as he believed them to have healing qualities. He also claimed to be a descendant of the Mughals and "traced his family's lineage directly back to the Mongol Emperor Changez Khan". He kept his treasure of "brittle yellow papers that he believed verified his claim" in a small tin trunk (Roy, 2017, p. 14) and when journalists came round to interview him he would open the trunk and show them. But "regardless of what appeared or did not appear in the newspapers" (Roy, 2017, p. 14) the truth was always manipulated and whatever they could sell as a captivating story was sold:

If it was a double spread, a small portrait of Mulaqat Ali might even be published along with some close-ups of Mughal cuisine, long shots of Muslim women in burqas on cycle rickshaws that plied the narrow filthy lanes, and of course the mandatory bird's-eye view of thousands of Muslim men in white skullcaps, arranged in perfect formation, bowed down in prayer in the Jama Masjid. Some readers viewed pictures like these as proof of the success of India's commitment to secularism and inter-faith tolerance. Others with a tinge of relief that Delhi's Muslim population seemed content enough in its vibrant ghetto. Still others viewed them as proof that Muslims did not wish to 'integrate' and were busy breeding and organizing themselves, and would soon become a threat to Hindu India. Those who

subscribed to this view were gaining influence at an alarming pace. (Roy, 2017, p. 12)

What we understand from the above passage is that despite Mulaqat Ali being an Indian living a regular life as a Hakim, his story was used to promote sectarian marginalisation in India. If the newspaper had a mainly Hindu readership, the images of Muslim women in burqas and "thousands of Muslim men … bowed down in prayer" were used to incite anti-Muslim violence by ridding the Indian Muslims of normalcy and showing them as extremists whose sole purpose of existence was to plan and carry out sectarian atrocities. Simply because Mulaqat Ali was part of the Muslim minority in India, his story about his family's ancient lineage stretching back to the Mongol Emperor Genghis Khan was exploited to support the notion that Muslims considered themselves separate from a Hindu majority India and were therefore a threat to that Hindu majority.

The violence inflicted upon the various sects by the government, the army, the police force, and their agents reeked of hatred at a deeper level but was always manipulated by the media to serve the interests of a certain group of people. When, "in order to better understand the politics of Duniya … Anjum began to read the papers carefully and to follow the news on TV" (Roy, 2017, p. 26), she gradually realised that the information she was being given was filtered to promote certain sentiments towards a specific sect and instil micro-aggressive behaviour in others. Her exposure to the news enabled her to recognise the ideological bias of news outlets and whether they were promoting a Muslim version of freedom and justice or a Hindu version of freedom and justice. "Every day Anjum, new to the news, watched TV reports about bomb blasts and terrorist attacks that suddenly proliferated. The Urdu papers carried stories of young Muslim boys being killed in what the police called 'encounters', or being caught red-handed in the act of planning terrorist strikes and arrested" (Roy,

2017, p. 26). One side or the other was constantly being demonized by the press. On a Hindu news station, Hindus were repeatedly being reported as having been tortured by the Muslims: "a railway coach had been set on fire by what the newspapers first called 'miscreants'" (Roy, 2017, p. 28), and the Muslims were always shown as bloodthirsty terrorists who were eliminated in police 'encounters' to restore law and order. Throughout the novel, journalists and reporters are sent to scenes of interest to ensure that the most sensationalist story is extrapolated from each situation, then modified and altered to reinforce the reader's prejudices and the newspaper's political agenda or narrative.

Just as Mulaqat Ali quickly learned that journalists were more interested in pushing a particular narrative than actually telling his story, so did his daughter Anjum. As narrated in the novel, both had their stories altered in a way that would disregard the facts in order to fit with the ideological bias of the newspaper and incite emotional responses from its readers. Anjum was often interviewed by the press after becoming an active member of a brothel for Hijras, but the interview process quickly made her realize that her authentic story was of little, if any, interest to the reporter:

> they were invariably disappointed when she told them how much her mother and father had loved her and how *she* had been the cruel one. 'Others have horrible stories, the kind you people like to write about,' she would say. 'Why not talk to *them*?' But of course newspapers didn't work that way. She was the chosen one. It had to be her, even if her story was slightly altered to suit readers' appetites and expectations. (Roy, 2017, p. 19)

As this passage implies, the main purpose of the media was not to inform or to make aware, but to sensationalise people and events and to sell newspapers. Anjum was used by the media to serve a conservative socio-political narrative about how people only become whores because they are mistreated or misunderstood as children.

Another key element of news reporting that is brought out in the novel is the way in which "newspapers were censored" (Roy, 2017, p. 23) in the name of protecting people from sensitive information, ignoring the irony that it was the people themselves who were experiencing the sensitivity first hand. Prior to the division of the country, the news that had been reported was of an India that was once open with its masses and that sought to keep its citizens well-informed. But with the India-Pakistan division, the Kashmir issue and the ruthless killings that followed, the old ways were abandoned in order to either incite sectarian violence or divert the people's attention away from the government-sponsored bloodshed. As mentioned above, Mulaqat Ali's Mughal ancestry story was used to incite sectarian division and violence in India. Anjum's brothel story, on the other hand, was a sensationalised piece used purely for entertainment.

Anjum was exoticism personified: not only was she a transgender-prostitute, she was also a Muslim. She was a topic of interest both for the masses and for the media. The Duniya saw her as a minority figure, a "freak", and therefore as someone for younger children to poke fun at and for older children to throw insults at: "*Ai Hai*! *Saali Randi Hijra*! Sister-fucking Whore Hijra. Sister-fucking Muslim Whore Hijra" (Roy, 2017, p. 36). The media saw her as an "exotic animal", a spectacle, a source of entertainment and profit. Newspaper reporters presented her in their news stories like an exotic circus animal "turning tricks" for the entertainment of others. Film-makers and journalists who came to interview her made no effort to try to understand Anjum's experience of life, either in the Duniya or in the Khwabgah: "they set up their camera while they were talking and asked Anjum to look straight into the lens when she spoke. They had no idea what Duniya meant in Anjum's lexicon. Anjum, for her part, completely uncomprehending, stared into the camera." This lack of interest in Anjum's true perspective further validates the notion that the film-makers

like the journalists were only concerned with whatever narrative they were pushing and not Anjum’s actual narrative.

In turning Anjum into a form of media entertainment, the journalists’ degraded Anjum’s character and trivialized her art. She was severed from her humanity and what she felt was her true ambition, “to be a mother” (Roy, 2017, p. 21). Whereas the media saw her only as a transgender whore, Anjum saw herself as neither a whore nor a woman, but as a person with many different facets: “Who says my name is Anjum? I’m not Anjum, I’m Anjuman, I’m a *mehfil*, I’m a gathering. Of everybody and nobody, of everything and nothing. Is there anyone else you would like to invite? Everyone's invited” (Roy, 2017, p. 9). The many layers of her character were always denied due credit under the limelight of her being “Delhi’s most famous Hijra” (Roy, 2017, p. 19). Unlike the media’s representation of her as an exotic circus animal, Anjum’s ambition after spending many years in the Khwabgah was “to return to the Duniya and live like an ordinary person. She wanted to be a mother, to wake up in her own home, dress Zainab in a school uniform and send her off to school with her books and tiffin box”. None of these facts were sensational enough for the human-interest story, so what was reported made her humanity futile and irrelevant. Through this opposition between Anjum’s inner complexities and the media’s calculated aim to present her as a circus freak, the reader, like the characters in the novel, is given deep insight into the manipulative and subjective nature of the media.

### 4.2 Real News

As discussed in the previous section, the fine line between real news and fake news is often blurred. As the word suggests, fake news is either fabricated, exaggerated or just plain false. On the other hand, news that can be backed up with hard evidence is

real news. This discrepancy between what is reported as factual information and what is actually factual is shown in the novel by a subtle opposition between the media narrative and a counter-narrative. In this section, the counter-narrative will be explored through two characters: Dr Azad Bhartiya and Tilo.

Dr Azad Bhartiya's character appears as someone attempting to defy the published news by taking matters into his own hands. After changing his name from "Inder" meaning supreme god to "Azad" meaning freedom, Dr Bhartiya moved from his home in Bihar, a state in East India on the border with Nepal, to live on the streets of New Delhi in the far west of India to speak out about social injustice. Roy very cleverly places him in the Jantar Mantar district of New Delhi. The name "Jantar Mantar" refers to the sun-dial that as Dr Bhartiya writes in his newsletter was "built by some Maharaja, I have forgotten his name, in the year 1724" (Roy, 2017, p. 67). The term Jantar Mantar literally means an instrument to measure the harmony of the heavens and it is on the streets of New Delhi that Dr Bhartiya believes is the best place for him to measure the daily indignities and injustices of those who live in this poor area of city. Dr Bhartiya records his observations in a "newsletter", which can be seen as a comment on how information is manipulated and fed to the public without verification. Even the word "newsletter" implies the difference between the news and a personal document such as a letter. Not only does Dr Bhartiya's newsletter comment on religious oppression, it also comments on white supremacy through his reference to the American Army officers as "dogs". (As seen in the previous chapter, dogs are often used in the novel as a metaphor for the brutality of the Indian Army. It is also used in the nickname "Running Dog of Imperialism" (Roy, 2017, p. 82) that was given to a key character in the novel, Dasgupta, when he was a university student. True to his nickname, Dasgupta went on to become an intelligence officer for the Indian government.) Unlike the news being published

across platforms, Dr Bhartiya does not sensationalise the truth. He states what he knows, has experienced or has observed people to experience without altering or modifying the facts. His newsletter also functions as an account of events that have really happened to real people. He simply tells it how it is. For example, he reports simply and factually that “last week I was hit by a white car, Maruti Zen DL2CP 4362 belonging to an Indian TV Channel funded by Americans” (Roy, 2017, p. 66).

Stories similar to the above mentioned crash typify those events that are rarely reported in the news. Dr Bhartiya explicitly refers to himself as someone who “tells the truth” (Roy, 2017, p. 66) and his focus is always on the importance of truth, even if these truths are considered by the press to be of little or no importance. He reports these incidents of daily oppression to expose the inequality and injustice that surrounds him in Jantar Mantar and that no journalist is interested in reporting. In many ways, Dr Bhartiya’s newsletter is the true voice of the downtrodden people who are rarely listened to. He refers to them as people who have “their dreams and demands”, but “There is nobody to listen. No one listens. The police beat them; the government ignores them.” Since these people cannot join his street protest because they are “mostly from slums and they have to earn their living”, he stays there on their behalf “For their progress, for the acceptance of all their demands, for the realisation of their dreams and for the hope that someday they will have their own government” (Roy, 2017, p. 66). Through these statements he not only clarifies the purpose of his street protest and his newsletter but sheds light on the masses who often continue living a life of frustrated destitution in the face of an indifferent government and its ruthless law enforcement agencies.

In his newsletter, Dr Bhartiya refers to tour guides and tourists who have come to see the famous Jantar Mantar, the sun-dial referred to above, but who ignore him and his supporters sitting in protest “on the side of the road, fighting for a better world in this

Democracy Zoo" (Roy, 2017, p. 67). Dr Bhartiya compares this area of New Delhi to a zoo where tourists view the spectacle of the city's poor with the same detachment that they used to watch the snake charmers and sadhus (holy men). He ends his newsletter with these words: "We sit here like caged animals being fed little pieces of hope by the government through the bars of this iron railing. Not enough to live on, but just enough to prevent us from dying. … They send their journalists to us. We tell our stories. For a while that lightens our burden. This is how they control us" (Roy, 2017, p. 67). In these lines Dr Bhartiya implies two things: first that the world of news and media is nothing short of a media circus throwing morsels to animals in a cage so they continue to perform for the people's entertainment but do nothing to improve the lives of the caged animals, and second that the government sends the journalists to them as a form of surveillance, like the American guard "dogs" whom he believes have put him on 24-hour surveillance through traffic cameras.

The fact that Dr Bhartiya's name literally means "free" is an ironic indication of how no one truly was. His publications are presented in the novel as a way of reclaiming the narrative and through which he attains true liberation because the news reported by journalists fails to reflect the hardships of India's poor. When speaking of certain events, he writes: "that is confirmed, it was in the newspaper" (Roy, 2017, p. 66), which both trivialises and mocks the understanding of truth as equivalent to what could be seen and read in the newspapers. His declaration at the very end of his newsletter, "I do hereby declare that all the information given herein above are true to the best of my knowledge and no material has been concealed therefrom" (Roy, 2017, p. 67) is an ironic reference to the fact that what people read in the news is mostly biased, inaccurate, and altered. This can be seen in further clarity with Amrik Singh's character who is the epitome in the novel of all that is irrevocably evil.

Major Amrik Singh thrives on torturing the Kashmir activists and is shunned even by the Indian army for what he represents. However, Singh's portrayal of himself and his wife in the report he fabricates for his application for asylum in the United States is a further comment on the numerous unreliable narratives that are presented in the novel. He presents himself as innocent and wrongly accused of killings that could potentially get him killed, which eventually gets him asylum in the United States. The truth, on the other hand and as discussed in the previous chapter, is to the contrary. He is someone who has been given the epithet "Otter" for his shrewd ability to identify those who represent a potential threat to his ideological beliefs and to snuff them out. "Seventeen years have gone passed and the Kashmiri Muslim terrorists still celebrate that lawyer man's death. In the newspaper and on the internet they still blame my husband", writes Amrik Singh's wife, a woman whom Singh often physically abused. In Kashmir, however, Singh's account of his innocence was "received as slapstick comedy" (Roy, 2017, p. 98). As the narrator ironically remarks, "their [the Singhs] story rang so true because it *was* true, except that the victims and the perpetrators had swapped roles" (Roy, 2017, p. 99).

Details of the Singh's application for asylum is one of the many documents contained in the boxes of clippings and official documents that Tilo had collected and stored in her innocently labelled folders. This collection of classified material dating back to the time when Tilo had been a full-time stenographer for a military organization is perhaps one of the most significant narrative elements that highlights the importance of being able to distinguish real news from the white noise of the media. Similar to the newsletter written by Dr Bhartiya, Tilo writes about events and people that the media considers unimportant enough to be reported on. Just as Dr Bhartiya fights for the downtrodden of India whom no one glances a second time at, Tilo uncovers events and people who are easily overlooked in the media glare of

national and world politics. Tilo always "wrote strange things down. She collected scraps of stories and inexplicable memorabilia that appeared to have no purpose … She was not writing for a newspaper or magazine; she was not writing a book or making a film. She paid no attention to things that most people would have considered important" because the stories and memorabilia that she collected concerned the type of people that news reporters and journalists considered irrelevant to the grand narrative. "Over the years, her peculiar, ragged archive grew peculiarly dangerous", not because any of it "amounted to anything in the cut and thrust of the real argument in the real world" (Roy, 2017, p. 130), but because her clippings talked about freedom at the most primal level.

Tilo's collection spoke of individuals whose stories were a massive threat to the political hierarchy if uncovered but harmless if brushed under the rug as they had been for decades by the media lens. Through Tilo and her clippings and Dr Bhartiya and his newsletter Roy steps out of the subtlety of metaphors and directly attacks the reporters who never report on the daily tragedies in normal people's lives because these tragedies are indirectly caused by a corrupt government and equally corrupt corporations, both of which feed the news media to serve and publish a skewed narrative. Among other things, Tilo's collection, including jottings and recollections, is a consolidation of stories of those have suffered and survived or died at the hands of the police, the army and the likes of Amrik Singh. Her recollection of a militant's body that nobody wished to claim until it was claimed by the police is further evidence of how the news is used to the advantage of the military, the army or the government to ensure the masses remain inclined towards them and trust them enough to depend on them for safety. When the police discover that the man with the slit open throat was a renowned militant, Tilo reports how "nobody claimed the kill. So eventually the army CO and SP decided to claim it. They announced he had been

killed in an encounter following a Search-and-Cordon operation conducted jointly". However, the report that was made available to the masses read as follows: "In a fierce gun battle that lasted several hours a dreaded militant was killed in a joint operation by the Rashtriya Rifles and the Jammu and Kashmir Police led by Major XX and Superintendent of Police YY". A similar misrepresentation of the facts can be seen in another of Tilo's clippings announcing the "gruesome beheading of innocent civilian by militants" (Roy, 2017, p. 131), the adjectives "gruesome" and "innocent" immediately indicating the particular "truth" that is being fed to the masses.

Not only does Tilo's collection of "scraps of stories and inexplicable memorabilia" shed light on the fabrication of the news but also triggers the idea of how all news is based on some semblance of truth. Tilo's recoveries force the reader to see how bias and perspective alter the way in which news is both reported and received. Whereas media reports often alter the facts or falsify incidents altogether to serve specific military, political, or sectarian objectives, the counter-narrative to this fake news is provided in the novel by Tilo's archive and Dr Bhartiya's newsletter.

# CHAPTER 5
# SAFFRON AND THE HYPOCRISY OF RELIGIOUS PURITY

As I have tried to show in the previous three chapters of this dissertation, Arundhati Roy plays with several elements in the novel using them as metaphors to comment on the plight of the people in contemporary India. It can be argued that she does so to throw light on the problematic violence that pertains to India especially when it comes to religious minorities and other sects. This chapter deconstructs Roy's use of the colour saffron in the novel by looking into the history of the colour, its relevance and significance to people following Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism, and how Roy uses it in the novel. For example, I establish what it means to have the colour saffron in the Indian national flag and in the saffron-coloured triangular flag that is now used as a symbol of Hindu nationalism. This comparison is furthered through historical analysis of India as a hub of religious violence due to being one of the largest countries to house several religions before and after partition. Lastly, the chapter cohesively brings together the historical use of the colour, its relevance in the novel, and how Roy uses it to represent religious violence, intolerance and fear amongst the masses even though it is meant to represent the very opposite.

## 5.1 Religious Violence: An Overview

India is known to be the center of intolerance for a number of religious minorities that continue to reside there. Over the course of the last few years, this violence has increased especially towards the Muslim and Kashmiri minorities over the fluctuating political relationship between India and Kashmir. This increase in violence has forced several national writers and journalists to voice their concerns and their disagreements with Indian politics because of its detrimental influence on the minorities. This section of the chapter will explore the history and the current

situation of religious violence in contemporary India.

Over time, religious minorities in many countries are subject to new laws to ensure their safety and protection, laws such as those introduced by the United Nations for the "promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities" (Minorities Inclusion, 2021). Irrespective of these laws, countries where more than one religious group resides, a single religion often occupies a place of superiority and dictates the fate of the others unlawfully. This often leads to mass scale riots and street protests, where individuals from other sects take to the streets to fight for the protection not just of their own lives but to claim their right to exist as the only dominant religion. In most cases and countries, these riots often lead to bloodshed and mass deaths.

In places like Pakistan and India these acts of violence are more prevalent than they are in other parts of the world. In Pakistan, several *Shias*, a minority Muslim sect, are killed every year primarily because their understanding and teaching of Islam is different to the majority Muslim sect who refer to themselves as *Sunnis*. On the other hand, many Christian villages and churches are also burnt down by Muslims merely out of religious hatred and intolerance and to tacitly announce to the masses which religion is the superior one within the Pakistani border. Additionally, under the blasphemy laws, any individual who speaks or demonstrates their disbelief in Islam, is automatically liable to a public death. As a consequence of this rather vague law, men, women and children lose their lives at the hands of angry mobs and peace violators who take the law into their own hands and kill anyone they believe has defied Allah and Islam. Similar incidents have been reported against the Muslims in Buddhist-dominant Myanmar leading to a forced exodus of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh and Malaysia in 2015, Shia Muslims living in the Sunni-dominant Middle East and Muslims residing within Hindu-dominant India. This religious

violence raises the question of how religions that are supposedly champions of peace, love, and harmony are the perpetrators of intolerance and violent aggression. This chapter delves deeply into this religious contradiction that dominates India today as it did in the past.

Religious violence, though driven by people, is often argued to have arisen out of the people's desire to appease their God and to follow the instructions, often conveniently modified, given by God through religious scriptures to maintain peace and harmony. This is why most excuses and explanations that follow religious, secular or sectarian violence can easily be shown to be exaggerated, falsified and prone to errors. An act of religious violence is often grossly simplified as an act that supports the perpetrators' belief, love and admiration for their religious teachings. These oversimplifications often ignore the deeply rooted factors that are almost always at the basis of such violent acts and, more often than not, are political. Considering the pattern of religious violence, it can be argued that religious violence is the embodiment of political beliefs and perverted religious teachings that are always driven by an ulterior political motive to justify one's own religious intolerance and inclination towards violence.

### 5.2 Religious Violence in Contemporary India

The subcontinent was divided into Pakistan and India in 1947 to cater to the religious needs of Muslims and Hindus respectively. Irrespective of the primarily religious incentive that drove the partition of the subcontinent, namely to ensure sectarian safety, peace and harmony, the Muslims that remained in the predominantly Hindu country (India) continue to be the recipients of violence and to suffer at the hands of the politics-driven violence. Post-partition, more than a hundred Muslims annually are reported to succumb to death at the hands of Hindus. Since 2005, however, the

frequency of religious riots along with the resulting death toll has reached new heights each year, especially during the time of the elections. It was recorded that 90% of Muslim fatalities were caused by religiously motivated hate crimes conducted in riots and by mobs that blindly followed a political leader who openly defied the right of Islam to exist in India.

The verb "to saffronize" is a concept known widely in India. It means to subject Muslims to harassment and religious violence in order to maintain the dominance of a "peaceful" Hindu majority population by men who declare their allegiance to a triangular shaped saffron-coloured flag (to be discussed in the next section). To ensure the religion is being followed even by those who are not Hindus, several Islamic religious festivities result in mass Muslim deaths by mobs waving the saffron flag. For example, on the Muslim feast-day of *Eid-ul-Azha*, Muslims who slaughtered cows as a religious peace offering, were murdered and killed by Hindu mobs since all Hindus worship the cow as a sacred animal. As a result of this, more than 250 Muslims have been killed every year between 2015 and 2018 on or around the feast of *Eid-ul-Azha* and have been labeled "illegal immigrants or even extremists, and accused … of hurting Hindu sentiment over cow slaughter" (Abidi, 2021).

Narendra Modi, the current Prime Minister of India, is held by many to be responsible for the increase in riots in India since his election in 2014. It is argued that Modi's government "has taken various legislative and other actions that have legitimized discrimination against religious minorities and enabled violent Hindu nationalism" (Abidi, 2021). In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Modi is often the implicit target of Roy's satirical comments on Indian politics voiced either by the novel's first or third person narrators. It was during his tenure as Prime Minister that a record high of religious hate crimes was recorded with a 30% increase. One

example of this was the public beating and lynching of a 24 year old Muslim man in the summer of 2019. The Muslim was not only beaten but was also forced to repeat slogans that represented the Hindu faith. His beating was followed by threats and his eventual death for being a Muslim in a Hindu majority country. The name of this individual was Tabrez Ansari and his lynching is one of several deaths caused by religious riots under Modi's rule.

Similarly, the Delhi riots in 2020 saw the loss of several Muslim lives as "Hindu nationalists attempted to discredit protesters, particularly Muslims, by accusing them of conspiring against national interests" (Abidi, 2021). Similar to the riots mentioned in *Ministry*, a Muslim boy named Zubair was beaten to death by 30 Hindus on the streets. During the beating, Zubair was declared a "bastard Muslim" while the mob chanted anti-Muslim slogans. Several other Muslims were tortured during their religious festivities as the Hindus who wished to "saffronize" the country would often throw bleeding bodies of butchered animals inside Mosques. Muslims were also burned alive in their homes and later had their bodies dumped in gutters merely to establish that the only way the peace and harmony of a predominantly Hindu country could be sustained was through the constant killing of the Muslim minorities. Along with Zubair and Tabrez, the 2020 Delhi riots resulted in the deaths of almost 50 Muslims at the hands of Hindu mobs.

Irrespective of the above and the increasing scrutiny that the Indian government faces for allegedly inciting and condoning murderous attacks on Muslim minorities, more than 300 hundred hate crimes have been recorded in India since June 2020. "Like many forms of nationalism, it plays upon the pride and fear of the majority group and attempts to demonise supposedly threatening minorities" (Smith, 2007. These are mainly directed at Muslims and Christians that reside within the country and are seen as attempts made by the Hindu mobs to "saffronize" India, an act which

the mobs call a form of purification. According to one report, between January and April 2022, 10 to 16 Muslim houses have been burned" (Kavki, 2022).

### 5.3 Saffron: A Sacred Colour of Hindu Purity

The concept of saffronizing is derived from the colour saffron that is considered perhaps the most sacred colour for the people of India. The colour represents fire and is seen as a way to clear and rid oneself of impurities. Since the division of the subcontinent, the colour has been associated with allegedly nomadic Hindus who claim to have dedicated their lives to the protection and sanctity of the religion. Thus, when an individual or a group of men and women is seen wearing this colour in India – the ascetic *saadhu*, for example, wears a saffron robe, a saffron turban, and saffron face-paint – they are considered holy and to be on an undying quest for light. To announce this quest and the sanctity of Hinduism, several houses in India can be seen with a saffron flag on their rooftops.

The triangular saffron flag is commonly known amongst Hindus as *Bhagwa Dhwaj*. The Hindi phrase is derived from the word "God" and signifies money, wisdom and pride. The colour itself has a multitude of meanings attached to it. Not only does it connote God, it also represents a strong sense of separation from all religions that lie outside Hinduism. Most significantly, the colour symbolizes a process of purification analogous to the colour of the rising sun that erases the darkness of the night. On the other hand, the word *Dhwaj* means "flag" and the shape of the saffron flag is two horizontal triangles that represent the flickering flames of a fire. In Hinduism, the act of burning is a symbolic act of purification as seen, for example, in the traditional cremation ceremony performed on wooden pyres (Anand, 2021). It is also seen, however, in acts of sectarian violence when Hindu mobs burn Mosques or Muslim houses or copies of the Quran.

Several critics have claimed that the saffron flag no longer represents a certain religious group in India. Instead, it has become almost impossible to separate the flag and its colour from India and its history, implying that it should be the quest of all Indians to ensure the purity of their country *as a Hindu nation*. Saffron has therefore come to be associated with Hindu culture (Anand, 2021), Hindu nationalism and, tacitly, the Indian nation itself. Accordingly, by displaying the triangular flag on one's rooftop or adorning one's forehead either with a saffron headband or a horizontal or vertical line of saffron-coloured face-paint is a strong representation not only of religious faith, but of Hindu nationalism. In other words, each individual who is in possession of this flag or who adorns himself or herself with the colour saffron automatically becomes the bearer of patriotism and feels justified in committing acts of sectarian violence in obedience to the demands of the saffron flag – an attitude repeatedly referenced by Roy in *Ministry*.

The saffron colour is also integrated into the tricolor national flag of India: it is the top horizontal band, below which is a middle band of white and a bottom band of dark green. Here, the colour saffron symbolizes selfless courage, but when this symbolism is combined with the fire symbolism of the *Bhagwa Dhwaj* (Anand, 2021), anyone who stands under the national flag of India does so as a fighter for freedom from impurities. In today's India, this means fighting anyone who threatens the Hindu religion and perpetrating acts of either ethnic or sectarian cleansing. As the omniscient narrator observes towards the end of the novel, "instead of saffron flags they now proudly waved the national flag – a trick" (Roy, p. 189).

### 5.4 Saffron and Roy's *Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

As discussed in the previous sections, saffron is a sacred color for Hindus as well as the colour used by Hindu extremist groups. In the novel, the colour is repeatedly

linked to India's political party members when it comes to inciting religious violence particularly towards the Muslim minorities. Through the use of this colour, Roy voices her own outrage at the anti-Muslim measures taken by Modi and his government, widely seen within India as part of his infamous nationalist agenda, and at the mobs that follow his rule. The novel is full of media reports of Hindu mobs attacking and killing Muslim groups and vice versa, but whenever the former attacks are mentioned, the narrative detail almost invariably contains some reference to the colour saffron. Through this thinly veiled device, used in the novel as a metaphor for nationalist violators of peace who seek to "saffronize" the country, Roy attacks the religious hypocrisy of those who identify themselves with a colour that traditionally symbolizes peace, sanctity, and harmony.

Anjum, the character discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, is not only a social outcast due to her dual sexuality but part of a religious (Muslim) minority. The novel recounts her experience of religious discrimination during the Gujarat riots. She is taken prisoner and becomes a keen observer of the markers that separate the political and the human. She notices the prime minister when "he appeared on TV in a saffron kurta with a slash of vermilion on his forehead, and with cold, dead eyes ordered that the burnt bodies of the Hindu pilgrims be brought to Ahmedabad, the capital of the state, where they were to be put on display for the general public to pay their respects" (Roy, p. 28). Notice here the stark contrast that Roy draws between the Prime Minister's saffron-coloured kurta tunic and his "cold, dead eyes", the latter implying a lack of humanity and the end goal of cleansing Gujarat of the Muslim mobs responsible for burning the Hindu pilgrims. Also implicit in the quoted lines is the prime minister's incitement of Hindu mob retaliation. By having the burnt bodies transported to the capital "to be put on display" and televised, the Prime Minister's main purpose is to make them a spectacle for those who still lived. Cloaked beneath

the phrase “for the public to pay their respects” is a clear incitement to further mob violence.

Through the narrative, Roy comments on the influence of Prime Minister Modi and how he triggers the mobs, acting as unofficial state agents, to begin the necessary cleansing. She writes how “the mobs were armed with swords and tridents and wore saffron headbands” (Roy, p. 28), a description that is greatly embedded in historical events. Just as a Modi announcement would incite his followers to mass murder Muslims while they are at prayer in the Mosque, Roy gives a fictionalized account of the impact that a staged media event by the Prime Minister might have on the saffron mobs, instigated by state agent provocateurs, and of course on the Muslim minorities.

> They had cadastral lists of Muslim homes, businesses and shops. They had stockpiles of gas cylinders (which seemed to explain the gas shortage of the previous few weeks). When people who had been injured were taken to hospital, mobs attacked the hospitals. The police would not register murder cases. They said, quite reasonably, that they needed to see the corpses. The catch was that the police were often part of the mobs, and once the mobs had finished their business, the corpses no longer resembled corpses (Roy, p. 28).

The reference here to “gas cylinders” and the mutilated corpses again emphasizes the contradiction between the mob’s saffron headbands and what the sacred colour is understood to represent. Whereas the mobs appear to be on a quest to cleanse, the narrative indicates the inherent hypocrisy of the murderous brutality, seen in this passage not only in the police’s failure to register the murder cases but in their mutilation of the bodies so they can no longer be identified.

In another mob killing recounted in the novel, Roy adds the pathos of human suffering by focusing on the death of a minor character named Zakir Mian, a friend of Anjum’s father, Mulaqat Ali. Zakir Mian’s death at the hands of the saffron men

during the Gujurat riots is witnessed by Anjum and continues to haunt her long after the event because she had not had the courage to try and save him. In a moving passage, the third person narrator presents the murder in the form of a nightmare, which enables Roy to amplify the inhumanity of sectarian bloodshed:

> she tried to dismiss the cortège of saffron men with saffron smiles who pursued her with infants impaled on their saffron tridents, but they would not be dismissed. She tried to shut the door on Zakir Mian, lying neatly folded in the middle of the street, like one of his crisp cash-birds. But he followed her, folded, through closed doors on his flying carpet. She tried to forget the way he had looked at her just before the light went out of his eyes. But he wouldn't let her. (Roy, pp. 35-36)

Through the repetition of "saffron" and the juxtaposition of the "saffron smiles" and the "saffron tridents", Roy emphasizes the hypocrisy of men fighting under a banner, or a "trident", that symbolizes religious purity. Too afraid to do anything, Anjum witnesses the "saffron men" drag Zakir's body away, killed merely because he was a Muslim and had therefore been marked out as someone unworthy to be left alive.

While Anjum is able to protect herself because she is a Hijra and represented "apshagun" (bad luck), Zakir Mian, a frail old man in his mid-seventies, symbolizes the innocence of those killed in mob attacks. By contrasting the extreme aggression of the mob with the extreme frailty of an old man, Roy amplifies the inhumanity of sectarian violence while at the same time making the goal or agenda or the mobs appear more ridiculous to the reader. Anjum witnessed "thirty thousand saffron parakeets with steel talons and bloodied beaks, all squawking together: "Mussalman ka ek hi sthan! Qabristan ya Pakistan! Only one place for the Mussalman! The Graveyard or Pakistan!" (Roy, p. 36). The hatred present in the hearts of these Hindus is proudly declared by their saffron bandanas, but is hypocritically hidden in

their day to day lives. When they were not incited by their Prime Minister to go on killing sprees, “the saffron men sheathed their swords, laid down their tridents and returned meekly to their working lives, answering bells, obeying orders, beating their wives and biding their time until their next bloody outing” (Roy, p. 38). What Roy is suggesting here is that this sly concealment of the rioters epitomizes the widespread daily hypocrisy in a predominantly Hindu country. The hypocrisy of the men who had taken upon themselves the responsibility of protecting India, even though they themselves represented the most prominent threat and toxicity for the religious minorities, is clearly intended to represent the hypocrisy of the Indian government, responsible for the protection of the country. And just as “the saffron parakeets retracted their talons and returned to green, and camouflaged themselves in the branches of the Banyan trees from which the white-backed vultures and sparrows had disappeared” (Roy, p. 38), so the government’s agent provocateurs remove their saffron headbands and return to business as usual within the corridors of power, “biding their time, waiting in the wings” (Roy, p. 142). Once again, Roy’s reference to animals has a metaphorical purpose, the “white-backed vultures” symbolizing the hypocritical politicians who through proxy forces prey on harmless “sparrows” like Zakir Mian.

The most overt example of political deception in the novel is when the saffron parakeets, now camouflaged as regular citizens, pull off a palace coup. Chanting anti-government slogans and shouting “boisterous declarations of support” for the Chief Minister of Gujurat, another man with “cold eyes” but wearing the vermilion Hindu dot on his forehead rather than a saffron kuta, “they were under strict instructions not to wear their signature saffron headbands, not to carry saffron flags and never to mention Gujarat’s Beloved [Lalla] by name even in passing. It worked. Within days they had pulled off a palace coup” (Roy, p. 55). With deep irony, Roy

calls this act one of “humanity itself” further elaborating on the hypocrisy of the supporters of the Gujarat Chief Minister, now Prime Minister, who thrived only on fear mongering and mass killings of the innocent. Once in power, the saffron brutality quickly resurfaced. The camouflage was discarded and the mob killings returned, not just against Muslims but against all non-Hindus:

> In the new dispensation … ordinary people did not need to be scholars to know, even if they could not openly say so, that in the rise and rise of the Parakeet Reich, regardless of what may or may not have been meant in the scriptures, in saffron parakeet speak, the evil demons had come to mean not just indigenous people, but everybody who was not Hindu. (Roy, p. 47)

Under the saffron banner, its colour and shape symbolizing the sacred, purifying fire, Hindu mobs would literally “burn bodies,” “burn widows” and even “burn police stations”. Whether or not the victims of their hatred presented a threat to the country, the mobs followed the orders given by their Prime Minister rather than the commands given in the scriptures. To the religious minorities depicted in the novel, the colour of purity, light and knowledge comes to represent religious intolerance, death and horror. Under the guise of the first person narrative voice of Dasgupta, the mutual friend of Tilo, Musa, and Naga, Roy baldly states that in 21$^{st}$ century India “the saffron tide of Hindu Nationalism rises in our country like the swastika once did” (Roy, p. 83).

Unlike the metaphors discovered and detailed in the other chapters, the idea of saffron in the novel epitomizes inhumanity at its most extreme. It demonstrates the internalization of barbarism, fascism and inhumanity and how it trickles down from the political officials to the masses until it evolves as a day to day problem for the minorities to face. Additionally, whereas the other chapters highlighted the

significance of humanity as a constant underlying theme, the analysis of saffron has shown how Roy, through passages that barely conceal her rage, foregrounds instances of flagrant inhumanity

# CHAPTER 6

# CONCLUSION

Arundhati Roy made a name for herself after winning a Booker Prize for her first book *The God of Small Things*. Since then she has gained popularity for her political activism and vocal and controversial opinions regarding the government of India. While Roy may be a notable activist writing and voicing her disagreements with the Indian policies, she is also an extremely empathetic writer with a unique tendency to use her narratives to become the voice of the overlooked and the outcasts whether they are the religious minorities, eunuchs or marginalized casts and genders.

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is no different. It addresses issues pertaining to sectarian violence, the treatment of Muslim minorities in India, the inhumane treatment of Kashmiri resistance fighters, and the unjust use of media and television news to slavishly support the government, through the voices of many characters in two locations: Delhi and Kashmir. In this dissertation I have tried to show how the novel transcends the easy to identify political narrative through multiple touching, sensitive and profoundly moving narratives saturated with metaphors that juxtapose the brutal and the empathetic aspects of man. With every character, not only is the struggle of the minorities and the Kashmiri freedom fighters brought to life, but their shared human suffering speaks the language of basic human values. The chaotic narrative comments on the wallflowers, the outcasts, and the resistance fighters and shows how they contain within them a deeper sense of being human than those who either ignore or violate them.

Through a close reading of a selection of the novel's many symbols, I have tried to uncover the humane aspects in *Ministry* that are symbolically represented throughout

the narrative. These symbols are explored through four chapters. The first chapter exposed Roy's symbolic use of gender identity to represent life and death. Through the character of Anjum and her narrative, the first chapter showed how Anjum's gender struggles first as a non-conformist boy within the *Duniya* and then as a Hijra desiring something beyond the transgender life offered in the Khwabgah metaphorically requires the killing and rebirth of gender within her. My dissertation reads her as an individual who never fully becomes male or female and how that constitutes her humanity and enables her to eventually find life in a place of death where belonging to a specific gender no longer remains necessary for peaceful survival.

The second chapter focused on animals as important symbols within the narrative. It was shown how animals are used in the novel to represent the brutal and predatory nature of the Indian army and powerful politicians on the one hand and the harmless and preyed upon Indian civilians on the other. The novel's deployment of birds, dogs and otters exposes how the innate nature of different kinds of animals are used by Roy as symbols of either human aggression and surveillance or human compassion and vulnerability. The chapter further explored the relationship between man and man as viewed through the novel's animal metaphors but also through the non-metaphorical relationship between man and animal

The third chapter revealed how the media and news reporting is portrayed in the novel as a media circus and how those who are reported on by the media are viewed without empathy and to some extent as performing circus animals. This analysis attempted to highlight the way in which Roy spotlights the controlled and subjective reporting of the political happenings in India and how this type of reporting impacts the way the masses and militants respond to political unrest and, in particular, to savage sectarian mob killings. The chapter also drew attention to the way in which

Roy depicts the masses as being constantly fed, both directly and indirectly, juicy morsels of sectarian hatred and paranoia through manipulated media narratives that represent the sectarian “other” as a constant threat to peaceful existence.

The last chapter delved into another of the novel’s prominent symbols, the colour saffron, in order to shed light on the cultural significance and prevalence of the colour in contemporary India. The chapter highlighted the novel’s repeated juxtaposition of the religious/spiritual symbolism of the colour saffron and its debasement in the concept of “saffronization”. The latter means Hindu nationalist policies and propaganda which are shown in the novel to have become a common feature of contemporary Indian life. Viewed by Roy as the epitome of man’s inhumanity to man, the curse of saffronization is portrayed in the novel as the root cause of mass killings which continue to ensure that India remains an unsafe place for all those who are not Hindu.

Through an original reading, this dissertation has attempted to show how roy’s use of symbolism in *ministry* is intended to challenge the reader to question their opinion, or lack thereof, on the treatment of muslim minorities, abandoned young girls, hermaphrodites, religious converts, and misfits in today’s india and of freedom fighters in kashmir. Through *ministry*’s narrative, the myriad individuals that have been shunned by society are given a voice and a story that remain longer in the reader’s memory than the novel’s relentless exposure of the brutal injustices of the indian army, government, and its state agents that have plagued india and kashmir for decades.

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