

EXPLORING IDENTITY AND SPACE OF HIJRA: ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

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ABSTRACT

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is a significant novel by Arundhati Roy, an influential author in Indian writing in English. In this novel, the author addresses the multi-dimensional and multifaceted story of a minority community called hijra. The hijra creates prejudices among all classes of people for their gender identity defined by society, and Roy presents the harsh reality of the hijras in India. Anjum, the main character of the novel, whose previous name was Aftab, is a hermaphrodite. When she is born, she carries a small and unformed girl-part underneath his boy-part. She is therefore treated as a curse to her family and leads her whole life within the margin of the society. The hijras are also males who like to experience a feminine identity. In the novel, there are some other hijras named Bulbul, Razia, Heera, Baby, Nimmo, Mary and Gudiya who have a guru called Kulsoom Bi. As far as gender identity is concerned hijras are neither men nor women; they take female names when they join the community and use female kinship terms as 'aunty', 'sister', and 'grandmother' to address each other, and their communication occurs in feminine intonation and expression. The hijras are also known as 'third sex' or 'third gender' in some Asian and South Asian countries. There are some laws to protect the rights of

the community, but the society does not treat them as other people. They either assimilate or hide their gender identity or live a life of the most marginalized people in society. This analytical research explores the identity of hijras who are treated as untouchables and discriminated by family and society. The paper also examines the precarious and reckless state of hijra identity in the mainstream Indian society.

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INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy, a prominent writer and cultural figure, achieved recognition in 1997 for the debut Booker prize winning novel *The God of Small Things* and took twenty years to publish the second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, selected for Man Booker Prize in 2017. In this novel, Roy explores the alternate structures as kinship and resistance in hijras. Anjum, portrayed in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, is one of the most significant hijras who face subjugation for both gender and racial identities. Firstly she is a hijra, secondly a Muslim, so she goes through some challenges. Roy addresses Anjum as a person who searches for identity from the very early childhood. As a Muslim, she faces communal conflict, and as a hijra she observes that things are twisted around her. In India hijras are excluded in the family and from the mainstream social, cultural, religious, professional and political life. Anjum's family treats her as a male after her birth, but she chooses hijra identity due to her biological reason. Her name was Aftab as Dr Nabi states, "Aftab was a rare example of a Hermaphrodite, with both male and female characteristics, though outwardly, the male characteristics appeared to be more dominant" (Roy16-17). Aftab's male characters dominate, but he also has the feminine tendency. He faces racism, gender inequality and religious fanaticism when he was Aftab and after adopting hijra identity Anjum.

DISCUSSION

Hijras are isolated from the society, deprived of their basic rights and forced to lead a life without self-respect even in postglobalised position. They are subjugated by male, female and even by hijras within the society. The word hijra is derived from the Persian word *hiz* which means ineffective and incompetent. The alternative words for hijra are hijada, hijara, hijrah, and it is pronounced as "heejra" or "heejda". The word hijra

refers to ‘eunuchs’ or ‘third gender’ in India and some South Asian countries. Though they have combined gender identities, they adopt feminine gender roles and adorn themselves with feminine attires. The famous feminist of Indian Writing in English Kamala Suraiyya Das in the poem “The Dance of the Eunuchs” portrays the objectification of the eunuchs who adopt women identity and thus they are defined by the normative rules. Das writes:

It was hot, so hot, before the eunuchs came

To dance, wide skirts going round and round

They danced and They danced, oh, they danced till they bled ... (p.7, 1-6)

Das portrays that eunuchs are greatly oppressed and neglected in the society and they dance even in the hot day to earn money for their existence, but nobody cares for their pain. The poem shows eunuchs’ joyless life, their painful and mechanical dancing and their melancholic songs with harsh voices. Roy shows that not only Anjum but also other hijras have the masculine and feminine tendencies. They adopts dance as a media for earning to survive. In *Neither Man Nor Woman*, in response to the question “What is a hijra?” a hijra named Gopi states, “. . . the most common view, held by both hijras and people in the larger society, that the hijras are an alternative gender, neither men nor women” (Nanda 13). Hijras face identity crisis for the concept of the people of society that hijras are neither man nor woman. Living in the periphery of hijra culture, hijras are separated from society. They have a psychological agony that when people see them, they look negatively and pass comments. Moreover, people in different societies of India have a taboo about their gender identity.

Gender is a cultural construct as Michel Foucault argues that “sexuality is not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category of experience which has historical, social and cultural, rather than biological, origins” (qtd. in Spargo 12). A person’s identity is defined by his body and sexual identity is a society which is a repressive and negative force. Therefore, power relation occurs and it is centralized by a group of people and it includes the hierarchical divisions based on social, political, and economic practices and institutions. Roy portrays the polarization of gender and race regarding the identity of hijras who are treated as inferior, untouchable and marginalized in Indian society. Kath Woodward writes, “The world was ordered by gender divisions with gender giving meaning to social divisions” (109). Gender is related with the social divisions of class, race, disability, and sexuality. Hijra community is divided and segregated in society for the differences of sexuality. They are treated and discriminated as third gender in India and the recent word for hijra is transgender to the people of the world. In *Transformations*, a Journal of Media and Culture, M. Morgan Holmes, professor of sociology at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Canada, in an article titled “Locating Third Sexes” addresses:

...much of the existing work on cultural systems that incorporate a ‘third sex’ portrays simplistic visions in which societies with more than two

sex/gender categories are cast as superior to those that divide the world into just two. I argue that to understand whether a system is more or less oppressive than another we have to understand how it treats its various members, not only its 'thirds'.

Holmes argues that in the existing cultural system of the society male and female (two sexes) are superior to the third sex or gender. In every society of this world gender identity focuses only on masculine and feminine identities, and third gender is a concept in which individuals are classified either by them or by society, and they do not get space in the society equally. Anjum as a third gender continuously struggles to get space in the society. She faces racial conflict too as she is a Muslim hijra. The word caste or *varna* is a practice taken from the oldest Indian scripture *Veda*. There are four castes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Shudras in India. There is a special caste called untouchable and hijras are people of that class; moreover, Muslims are not members of any caste. Simon During states, "The South Asian caste system is effectively racism since different castes are deemed to have different body types and capacities" (161). During observes that the characteristics and lifestyles of different castes are different. In Indian society Caste system is similar to racism that creates oppression and discrimination. Roy shows sympathy towards the marginalized dalits and hijras and she states, "The upper-caste, upper-class oppressor from every angle" (195) is considered a dominant group who oppresses hijras. They treat them as outcasts and untouchable, subhuman, inferior and subaltern. As an inferior group in society hijras cannot share their choice with anyone and cannot take part in any social programme freely, because mainstream society does not understand their culture, gender, psychology and biological conditions.

India is a multiracial and multicultural country where the concepts of gender, class and caste create a sense of discrimination among different categories of people. The gender identity impacts on hijras' lives; they do not get gender recognition, employment, proper housing, and health-care services properly. They face discrimination and inequality so harsh that they feel that they are inferior. In *Neither Man Nor Woman*, Serena Nanda states, ". . . although cross-gender behavior in childhood is a prominent theme in hijra narratives, this behavior is not necessarily connected to a clear feminine gender identity" (115). Hijras are in-between gender, and they face cross-gender situation. They are controversial community in Indian society and their existence disrupts essential ideas about sex or gender. Holmes writes, ". . . recognition of third sexes and third genders is not equal to valuing the presence of those who were neither male nor female". Though hijras as third genders adopt feminine identity and they are not like ordinary Indian women. Society cannot accept them as female; rather, people have negative attitudes towards them.

Hijra community becomes an integral part to form a unique subculture in the society. They have a sort of sanctioned and visible place in Hindu society, but in the contemporary Indian context, when they try to get space

in the society, they suffer. In Indian Hindu mythology, hijras have a special place of love and respect. Gudiya states to Kulsoom Bi:

. . . when Lord Ram and his wife, Sita, and his younger brother Laxman were banished for fourteen years from their kingdom, the citizenry, who loved their king, had followed them, vowing to go wherever their king went. When they reached the outskirts of Ayodhya where the forest began, Ram turned to his people and said, 'I want all you men and women to go home and wait for me until I return.' Unable to disobey their king, the men and women returned home. Only the Hijras waited faithfully for him at the edge of the forest for the whole fourteen years, because he had forgotten to mention them. (Roy 51)

Hijras are blessed by Rama and they are respected in Indian society. Their culture mirrors much in Indian society and culture, but Indians do not give equal space in the society. Roy writes on the customs and important aspects of deprived people, because she is involved in social activities and revolution to bring a change in society. There are two categories of hijras: born hijras (hermaphrodites) and made hijras (eunuchs) in Indian society, and the reality of caste system enforces them to become underprivileged. They become the objects of fear, abuse, ridicule and sometimes pity. Aftab, who later transforms into Anjum, is the central character and was born in the middle-class conservative Muslim family. He has become a subject of shame and ridicule for his family and society.

Though hijra gender identity is recognized as third gender, they do not receive wide acceptance, encouragement and help from anyone. Aftab's mother Jahanara Begum discovers, ". . . nestling underneath his boy-parts, a small, unformed, but undoubtedly girl-part" (7). Jahanara Begum becomes terrified and hides his original identity, giving him a male name Aftab. In an Indian family birth of a son is the most significant event and it is a cause of great celebration. Jahanara cannot celebrate; rather she is in confusion in her son's identity. She hides Aftab's hermaphrodite identity from family and society for a long time. She expresses her agony, ". . . all things – carpets, clothes, books, pens, musical instruments – had a gender. Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman. Everything except her baby. Yes of course she knew there was a word for those like him – *Hijra*. Two words actually, *Hijra* and *Kinnar*. But two words do not make a language (8).

Hijra identity creates problem in a family and especially a hijra's mother psychologically suffer thinking about the uncertain future of her child. Aftab's mother faces the same pain and she feels shame when she thinks that all things have masculine or feminine identity except her son. She is in confusion whether she will love him as male or female. She visits Hazrat Sarmad Shaheed's dargah and whispers, "*This is my son, Aftab. I've brought him here to you. Look after him. And teach me how to love him*" (11). In real life a hijra's mother goes to mosque, dargah, temple to get the solution of her child's real identity. Begum is so concerned with Aftab's identity that she even does not share it with her husband. A mother feels timid to share her child's hijra identity to the family and society as

During states, “It is impossible to exist in a society without a proper name, without being located without the set of identity-granting institutions into which one is born: family or kin-group, nation, ethnic community, gender” (152). Name is important to define identity of a person in a society and national, ethnic and gender identities are static.

Roy shows that India is not a utopia for hijras, rather they are always abandoned from all social rituals. India has a long-established tradition of caste which specifies boundaries of purity and pollution between communities. Society is homophobic and hijras are not treated as human beings; they attempt to be connected with the society participating in different social celebrations as wedding, birth, and house-warming ceremonies. Roy writes, “. . . they descended on ordinary people’s celebrations – weddings, births, house-warming ceremonies – dancing, singing in their wild, grating voices, offering their blessings and threatening to embarrass the hosts . . . and ruin the occasion with curses and a display of unthinkable obscenity unless they are paid a fee” (24). Hijras dance, sing in their grating voices and offer blessings, threat to embarrass the hosts and sometimes ruin the occasion with curse and obscenity. Aftab has the talent of singing and reciting the Quran like common children. Roy portrays social prejudice about hijras the students of music class tease Aftab, “*He’s a She. He’s not a He or a She. He’s a He and a She. She-He, He-She Hee! Hee! Hee!*” (12). Society creates confusion within Aftab about his gender identity and he stops going to music class to avoid abuse, ridicule and prurient curiosity of the society. His sisters and brother go to school, but he always stays at home. His world becomes narrow, he stops social tie; therefore, he feels traumatic and suffocated at home and seeks a new life outside of the normative group.

The attitudes of many people in Indian society towards the hijras are ambivalent. Aftab’s father Mulaqat Ali talks about the medical treatment of the Modern Era for Aftab’s problem. Aftab comes to know from Dr Nabi that he has both male and female tendencies. His real identity is exposed when he reaches puberty and is elected for gender reassignment surgery. He transforms and becomes a glamorous woman named Anjum. When a person removes his male organ, she is considered a true hijra in comparison to others who still have appendage. Serena Nanda observes:

The hijras call the emasculation operation nirvan. Nirvan is a condition of calm and absence of desire; it is liberation from the finite human consciousness and the dawn of a higher consciousness. The Hindu scriptures call the beginning of this experience the second birth, or the opening of the eye of wisdom. The hijras, too, translate nirvan as rebirth. (26)

Emasculation is similar to nirvan to hijra community as in Buddhism nirvan is a state of mind that enlightens the illusory nature of the self, transcends all sufferings and attains peace. The transformed identity is considered as rebirth. Mulaqat Ali begins to tell the story about great heroes to increase manliness in Aftab. But Aftab is interested in the story

of beautiful women and he keeps bangles. Aftab feels attracted when he sees a tall and slim-hipped woman “wearing bright lipstick, gold high heels and a shiny, green satin salwar kameez buying bangles from Mir the bangle-seller who doubled up as caretaker of the Chitli Qabar” (18). The woman is a hijra, because ordinary women in his society wear burqas. Aftab becomes happy seeing the woman and he wants to be like her painting nails and wearing bangles in his wrist. Particular body behavior, dress and language are the expressions of gender identity as Pramod K. Nayar claims, “Clothing, mannerisms, speech and languages are all signs that bodies use to declare their gender to the world” (91). Language and clothing are signs of declaring the performance of gender. Whereas male and female biological and psychological identities are usual in society, hijra identity, the combination of men’s style and women’s manners, is unusual in society. Hand clapping is a common gesture for all hijras. In *Neither Man Nor Woman* Serena emphasises the psychological state of hijras and observes:

The hijra role and identity appear to be adopted by people whose sexual impotence has a psychological rather than an organic basis, but this, of course, does not make it less real. The concept of a psychologically compelling desire that motivates a man to live as a woman is not well understood in India generally and certainly not among the lower-middle and lower classes from which hijras are generally recruited. This may be part of the reason that hijras say they are ‘born that way’. (xx)

In Indian society, people have a mindset about hijras’ gender identity. They have a common concept that they are born as biologically man but psychologically woman. They make a sub-cultural form that disturbs the established ideas about gender and biology.

Gender identity is highly relevant in assessing the position of hijras in Indian society. Judith Butler argues, “Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time” (179). Butler’s observation regarding gender identity, as the above statement suggests, is apt in addressing the identity of hijras – hermaphrodites and transgender. Butler points out that gender identity is not stable, and it is subject to change and transformation. Aftab’s transformation, for example, is a point in case. To protect him and his family from societal stigmatization, Aftab goes to hijras’ house, joins their community. Most of the hijras mainly live in North India and some are found in other parts of India. Their life is a daily battle as there is no acceptance anywhere, and they are ostracized from the society and also ridiculed. Aftab feels choked after the psychological separation from family and society. He faces identity crisis biologically and psychologically. Nayar states, “Gender is a system of roles and values assigned to the biological traits and functions . . . gender is a social construction, a process whereby meanings are allotted to the acts like birth, sex, homosexuality and nurture” (90). Gender is a social attribution and imposition and society assigns the concept in such a way that an individual cannot offer a choice in the matter of gender. When

Aftab realizes that there is no space for him in his family and common society and he gets fresh air in Khwabgah (Urdu word), the House of Dream where seven hijras Bulbul, Razia, Heera, Baby, Nimmo, Mary and Gudiya live; at the age of eighteen Aftab willingly chooses hijra lifestyle and their place. The people of Khwabgah are either hermaphrodites or transsexuals. No one can live without society and hijras create their own society, an alternate duniya, where hijras follow their own rules, regulations and hierarchies.

Hijras are from different religions and in their social organization there is no caste and discrimination. In an anthology *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, D. C. J. Ibbetson, M. E. Maclagen and H. A. Rose write, "In some places, such as Gujarat, Hindu, and Muslim hijras live in different communes, but today in most cities Hindu and Muslim hijras — and Christians as well— live peaceably in the same households. Nineteenth-century reports claim that individuals 'become Muslim' when they join the hijra community" (319). Hijras have non-communal approach and they live together. In Khwabgah Mary is Christian who does not go to church, Gudiya and Bulbul are Hindus who occasionally visit temples and the rest of them are Muslims who go to mosques and dargahs where they are allowed to enter. Hijras have an ustad, a guru, named Kulsoom Bi who is older than others. Initially every hijra is known as 'chela' who has 'guru,' senior to them and controls the whole house. In Indian hijra culture, hijras make family relationships with other hijras or other males, and they sometimes make relationships with the hijras of other states. Though hijras have no blood relationships, they become a part of kinship network and create a sense of community.

Females are treated as inferior in patriarchal society. Simon de Beauvoir states, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine" (295). A person's feminine identity is defined by society and Hijras bear feminine identity, but society looks at them negatively. Their identity is unstable and the postmodern view of gender refuses the notion of fixity and universality in gender. Hijras face social oppression and at the age of fifteen Aftab faces discrimination everywhere and realizes that family and society are not fit for him. He does not find psychological peace after mixing with male or female in his family and society. Facing gender differences in family and society Aftab leaves his society and enters into another world. Roy writes, ". . . in a small ceremony he was presented with a skin Khwabgah dupatta and initiated into the rules and rituals that formerly made him a member of the Hijra community" (25). He was formerly accepted by the community and his identity transforms from male name to female as Anjum, the most famous hijra in Delhi, a city of ancient heritage. In Khwabgah she gets a real friend named Nimmo Gorakhpuri who is obsessed with Western women's fashion. She dresses as a man during Bakr-Eid, the biggest religious festival of Muslim for the

performance of sacrifice. Hijras choose feminine gender identity when they join the community and they use female kinship terms as 'aunty', 'sister', and 'grandmother' to address each other, and their communication occurs in feminine intonation and expression.

Anjum represents Indian hijras who are not well-received by the society. Roy states "Anjum was welcome to visit occasionally, but not to stay" (29). Anjum visits her family, but she does not stay with her family. Her mother sends mail everyday and she meets her mother at the dargah of Hazrat Sarmad Shaheed, but her father never meets her. In Indian society a hijra's father does not keep ties with his hijra child. Hijras lead a miserable life as Kulsoom Bi sleeps in the only bed of the haveli and others sleep in the verandah. Roy expresses, "In winter, when the courtyard grew cold and misty, they all crowded into Kulsoom Bi's room. The entrance of the toilet was through the ruins of the collapsed room. Everybody took turns to bathe at the handpump . . . narrow staircase led to the kitchen on the first floor" (21). Roy shows the crises of health, housing, education and employment what hijras face. Lois Tyson writes:

. . . members of the underclass and the lower class are economically oppressed: they suffer the ills of economic privation, are hardest hit by economic recessions, and have limited means of improving their lot. In sharp contrast, members of the upper class and 'aristocracy' are economically privileged: they enjoy luxurious lifestyles, are least affected by economic recessions, and have a great deal of financial security. (55)

Upper class people's lifestyle is more comfortable and they are privileged in various ways. In India upper caste people enjoy privileges, whereas hijras lead life in the shabby environment due to the economic deprivation. Despite all obstacles they have mental peace that they are chosen by God as Ustad Kulsoom Bi states, "Hijras were chosen people, beloved of the Almighty. The word *Hijra* meant a Body in which a Holy Soul lives" (27). All hijras believe that they are special and loved by God because they struggle every moment.

Anjum has ambition and leads life like ordinary people, adopting a girl child Zainab. This indicates that though hijras are incapable of giving birth to children, their female identity influences to arouse motherly feelings. Anjum is convinced that Saeeda, an educated hijra and younger than Anjum, considers herself to be a "transperson" (18) and envies her. Anjum has a relation with a client named D. Gupta. She meets a dalit named Dayachand, a chammar and his father was killed by upper class Hindu. Nanda writes:

A major difference between Hinduism and Islam involves their connection to the caste system, the principle that organizes Indian society. The Indian caste system may be defined as a system of ranked, culturally distinct, interdependent endogamous groups. An individual belongs to the caste of his or her parents and cannot move from one caste to another. Castes are usually associated with traditional occupations, and there are definite social boundaries between castes involving, for example, prohibitions on intermarriage, interdining, and other spatial and social contacts. In India,

caste is related to the Hindu ideas of spiritual purity and pollution, and the castes are ranked on the basis of these criteria. (159)

In the caste system, there is a distinction and upper class people oppress lower castes and untouchables and Muslims are subjects to social restriction. That's why Dayachand converts into Muslim and gets the new name Saddam Hussain after facing distinction. Anjum does not find difference between a Muslim and a chammar, both are untouchables. She is not gender and race biased and thinks that one human being can love another unconditionally. She watches TV reports to know about the daily occurrences of the world. Roy writes on the conflict between communal polarization and conflict between Hindu and Muslim. The seeds of communal conflict were sown during colonial period and communal riots and massacres occurred in different historical situations.

Roy writes about the political oppression connecting the Gujarat Massacre. In 2002, 60 Hindu pilgrims died for the bomb explosion in a rail compartment. As a result Gujarat Massacre occurred and with the flag of Hindu nationalism people attacked Muslims; hundreds of Muslims were slaughtered, killed, raped and massacred by the Hindus though it was not the first massacre. Hindu rivals degenerate and Persian and Urdu slogans are used by Muslims. Anjum, as a Muslim, is caught in Gujarat, but they do not kill her, because there is a social prejudice that “. . . killing Hijras brings bad luck” (63). Indian Hindus believe that hurting a hijra will bring misery. Mob destroys the graveyard of Bolidakhni and they make a road overnight. Chief Minister, police and public could do nothing. Anjum was in a refugee camp for many days; she was concern for her daughter and learns Gayotri mantra for her survival. At the age of forty-six she survives a massacre in Ahmedabad and leaves the Khwabgah in order to move into a cemetery where her father and ancestors were buried.

Anjum escapes from the massacre, and is moved and haunted by past almost like a dead person. She makes a guest house in the graveyard and she has transformed the graveyard into a guest house called “Jannat Guest House” which becomes a heavenly home to other marginalized and persecuted characters like her. She is an unidentified “she” who is currently living in a graveyard, notices the missing birds who have “excused themselves and exited from the story” (7). When she moves to the graveyard, she is harassed by the neighborhood who eventually decides to leave her alone; even municipal authorities do not disturb her.

The novel is, to a great extent, a book of love, motherhood and friendship. Anjum falls in love with a baby who is found at an old observatory in Delhi where various activists gather. S. Tilottama or Tilo has taken the baby from the place and Anjum tracks the baby to the house of the woman who has taken her. It reveals that Tilo has stolen the baby from the observatory; she has given the baby the name, Miss Jebeen. She is invited, and agrees to go live with Anjum at the Jannat Guest House. Anjum's life is metaphorically presented:

She lived in the graveyard like a tree. At dawn she saw the crows off and welcomed the bats home. At dusk she did the opposite. Between shifts she

conferred with the ghosts of vultures that loomed in her high branches. She felt the gentle grip of their talons like an ache in an amputated limb. She gathered they were not altogether unhappy at having excused themselves and excited from the story. (3)

Anjum is a symbol of strength, patience and power and she makes a new world. As a tree she opens her door for all kinds of deprived people. This place becomes a home of some odd balls, a baby picked up from trash, a blind untouchable man, an animal lover raised by hijras, a music teacher, a moulvi and Tilo. Jannat Guest House becomes heavenly as Tilo teaches classes in arithmetic, drawing, computer graphics, and “eccentricity” (403). Ustad Hameed gives singing lessons and Zainab and Saddam turn the graveyard into “a Noah’s ark of injured animals” (405). Anjum also decides to build a swimming pool without water. She holds feasts for festivals and invites her friends over to dine regularly at the graveyard-guest house.

Graveyard is a place of utmost happiness like heaven to all deprived people and Anjum seeks peace and consolation in the graveyard. Anjum conveys to Saddam Hussein:

Once you have fallen off the edge like all of us have, including our Biroo, you will never stop falling. And as you fall you will hold on to other falling people . . . This place where we live, where we have made our home, is the place of falling people. Here there *is no haqeeqat*. Arre, even *we aren’t real*. We don’t really exist. (84)

People’s economic condition may fall, but graveyard is uneconomic and universal where people will live peacefully. The residents of Jannat Guest House celebrate Zainab’s marriage to Saddam, a resident. The mother of Miss Jebeen the Second, Comrade Maase Revathy, a dedicated Communist, conceives a child through rape. The residents of Jannat Guest House accept the baby and agree to name her as Miss Udaya Jebeen. Anjum takes Miss Udaya Jebeen for a walk around Delhi in the last scene while a small dung beetle watches over the world.

In regard to identity, Zygmunt Bauman articulates, “In our world of rampant ‘individualization’, identities are mixed blessings...identities are perhaps the most common, most acute, most deeply felt and troublesome incarnations of *ambivalence*” (32). People are more individualized in the world, and this is why identities are considered to be “mixed blessings”. Sometimes, individuals are ambivalent about their identities as well. Anjum has the courage of accepting the reality and religion, gender and caste are nothing to her. So gender is not a barrier to survive in the postmodern period as Genny Beemyn and Susan Rankin write, “We live in a world where gender is more complex and more fluid. It is not enough to dispense with the notion of a gender binary; we must embrace and celebrate, the idea that gender is bound only, by the limits of people’s spirits” (166). Traditionally people’s concept about gender is either male or female. But transgender is a recognized identity and people have to come out from the traditional concepts, celebrate and accept hijra. Anjum’s non-communal, neutral and humanistic approaches are stated

thus, “It doesn’t matter. I’m all of them, I’m Romi and Juli, I’m Laila and Majnu. And Mujna, why not? 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...Everyone’s invited” (Roy 4). Anjum thinks that her identity is individual and type, local and global. Name does not matter to her, because she was Aftab and later becomes Anjum. If she is called Laila, Majnu, Mujna, Romi, Joli etc., she does not mind. She finds her identity in everybody, nobody, everything and nothing.

After death, hijras are properly buried in the graveyard, though public has the curiosity to know. Roy writes, “When Ustad Kulsoom Bi passed away in her sleep she was buried in grand fashion in the Hijron Ka Khanqah in Mehrauli. But Bombay silk was buried in Anjum’s graveyard. And so were many other Hijras from all over Delhi” (80). Many hijras get the spiritual retreat Hijron Ka Khanqah hijras after their death. People have curiosity about the funeral ceremony of hijras as the old Imam asks, “Is it true that even the Hindus among you are buried, not cremated” and Anjum indirectly answers, “You tell me. You’re the Imam Sahib, not me. Where do old birds go to die? Do they fall on us 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?” (5). Anjum thinks that God decides the identity of hijras and God makes a proper arrangement for them after their death.

Roy’s novels are, to some extent, interconnected; *The God of Small Things* is a book about a family of broken heart at it and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a book about different kinds of people who start their lives with shattered heart. They have to live amid violence, they bring them in the graveyard and make a transformed heart. The study shows the identity of hijra in Indian society where hijra is a full-time female impersonator. Tyson states, “. . . women are not born feminine, and men are not born masculine. Rather, these gender categories are constructed by society, which is why this view of gender is an example of what has come to be called social constructionism” (86). Gender identity is the manifestation of society and it explores one’s individuality as male, female, androgynous especially as experienced in self-awareness and behavior. Anjum is a member of traditional social organization, and she creates a sense of humanism among people, increasing the concepts of love, freedom, kindness, forgiveness, joy and humility. From anthropological aspect hijras play an important role to expose special relationships with some particular people. The novel starts and ends in the same graveyard, which becomes a heaven for human beings and animals that are connected together. There is no discrimination in graveyard and people do not need to be recognized as having a space in gender continuum and racial border in this place. In “Towards a Sociology of Gender Study: The Indian and UK Cases” Surya Monro states:

With regard to Indian notions of sex/gender, the concept of a soul that has successive incarnations, perhaps in bodies with different sexes, implies

liminality at the times when the soul is without a sexed body. There are also elements of degendering in some Hijra discourses, where Hijras are seen as occupying a particular place in Indian society because they are outside of male or female categorisation systems. (246)

CONCLUSION

Hijras belong to lower classes and poorer castes who experience marginalized economic structure. Though Anjum faces many adverse situations in mainstream social spaces, she tries to accommodate herself in the changing world. It is important that people come forward to eradicate discrimination and economic hardship that hijras go through. This paper explores that hijras are human beings, and they have rights to live with dignity.

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