



HETEROTOPIC SPACES AS THE SPACE OF THE 'OTHER' IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

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Abstract

Suzanna Arundhati Roy is a renowned Indian author who won the Man Booker prize for Fiction in 1997 for her debut novel *The God of Small Things* and twenty years later she published her master piece *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* in 2017. She is well known for her activities related to human rights and environmental issues.

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a complex narrative. She deals with gender issues, traumatic selves, spatiality and a lot more. She deals with heterotopic spaces to settle the traumatic psyche of her protagonists. Roy employs space as an important tool to depict gender relationships. The Ministry of Utmost happiness also includes space as a despicable character to define gender identities. The heterotopic spaces provide the Trans genders as well as those categorized as the 'other' a dependable shelter. The heterotopic space of a cemetery helps the female protagonists of Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* to sustain themselves in the discordant patriarchal world. The research paper intends to explore the influence of various heterotopic spaces employed by Roy to elevate the position of her gendered subalterns.

Keywords: traumatic Self, Spatiality, Heterotopia, gendered subalterns

Michel Foucault in his preface to *'The Order of Things'* elaborates the concept of heterotopia. Foucault describes heterotopia as the 'other' space. These are worlds within worlds. Or alternate spaces that provides shelter for the 'other'. Foucault quotes the examples of cemeteries, brothels, prisons, ancient gardens and more to explain the idea of heterotopia. These are places that are detached from the main stream. He denotes them as the subversive spaces, an opposition to the illusionary utopian ideal. Foucault calls it as 'spaces capable of juxtaposing in a single real place, several spaces, and several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault, 6)

Etymology of heterotopia traces back to ancient Greek where heteros means other, another or different and Greek morpheme ToTos meaning place. So heterotopia means another place or other place.as opposition to the idea of Utopia, which represents a perfect society heterotopia shelters all those who fall out of place from utopia. For Foucault heterotopias are spaces accommodating layers of meaning barely visible, heterotopias are therefore undesirable places in a utopian concept.

Heterotopias are of two types, crisis heterotopia and heterotopias of deviation. (Foucault, 179) crisis heterotopias are mainly confining places for the menstruating women and

women in labor. Heterotopia of deviation usually accommodates people who do not find a place for themselves in the main stream society. Heterotopias of deviation include hospitals, asylums, prisons cemetery.

Foucault describes cemetery as a perfect example of heterotopic space. "The cemetery is certainly a place unlike ordinary culture space. It is a space that is however connected with all the sites of the city, state or society or village etc. ..., since each individual, each family has relatives in the cemetery. In western culture the cemetery has practically always existed. (Foucault, 5)

Spatiality is one significant tool employed by the writers to analyze experiences of women and subalterns. Arundhati Roy explicitly brings out through her novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* that space determines the attitude of the gendered subalterns. In her novel space is a prominent character that determines gender identities. Heterotopic spaces helps the gendered subalterns to sustain themselves in the conflict struck main stream society. Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a convoluted and garrulous narrative attempting to enclose the complicated social structure with its caste identities and gender hierarchies. Roy being a social activist addresses her concerns related to the gendered subalterns in her novels. Roy's first novel *The God of Small Things* as well as *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* confronts the plights of the gendered subalterns. She raises her voice for the marginalized. Exploring the gender identity is the main theme of Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Roy therefore endorse innovative methods to break the stereotypical gender norms. Roy's protagonists throw down the gauntlet of gender binaries.

Anjum the trans woman is the protagonist of the novel. She lives in a graveyard. Graveyard is a typical heterotopic space introduced by Roy to shelter the 'other'. Roy introduces several heterotopic spaces in this novel to disclose the state of 'otherness'. Anjum born was Aftab with partially developed female sex organs. The novel elaborates Anjum's journey from Aftab towards discovering her 'self'. "and so, at the age of fifteen, only a few

hundred yards from where his family had lived for centuries, Aftab stepped through an ordinary doorway into another universe," (Roy, 25) Anjum born as a hermaphrodite is despised by her father and she takes refuge in Khwabagh. Khwabagh is a heterotopic space that accommodates the trans genders. "The Khwabagh was called Khwabagh, Ustad Kulsoom Bi said, because it was where special people, *blessed* people, came with their dreams that could not be realized in the Duniya. In the Khwabagh, Holy Souls trapped in the wrong bodies were liberated. (Roy, 53)

Anjum transforms her life in Khwabagh. She is no longer a troubled soul. Aftab becomes completely transformed to Anjum. Khwabagh similarly sheltered many broken souls. Roy portrays the glories Khwabagh once enjoyed.

'This house, this household, has an unbroken history that is as old as this broken city,' she said. 'These peeling walls, this leaking roof, this sunny courtyard – all this was once beautiful. These floors were covered with carpets that came straight from Isfahan, the ceilings were decorated with mirrors. When Shahenshah Shah Jahan built the Red Fort and the Jama Masjid, when he built this walled city, he built our Little haveli too. For us. Always remember – we are not just *any* Hijras from *any* place. We are the Hijras of Shahjahanabad. Our Rulers trusted us enough to put their wives and mothers in our care. Once we roamed freely in their private quarters, the zenana, of the Red fort. They're all gone now, those mighty emperors and their queens. But we are still here. Think about that and ask yourselves why that should be.' (Roy, 48, 49)

Anjum's encounter with the Gujarat riots affected her psyche. She decides to leave Khwabagh because Khwabagh could no longer accommodate her emotional state. She had to get her treated by a psychiatrist at Khwabagh to revive her. Understanding that a change in her life could bring her peace she decide to move out of Khwabagh. Roy's heterotopias are built to sustain her protagonists psyche. For Anjum to escape from the

traumatic experiences an alternate space like Khwabagh is insufficient. So she unearths more heterotopias and finally settle in a graveyard outside the city.

It was an unprepossessing graveyard, run-down, not very big and used only occasionally. Its northern boundary abutted a government hospital and mortuary where the bodies of the city's vagrants and unclaimed dead were warehoused until the police decided how to dispose of them. Most were taken to the city crematorium. If they were recognizably Muslim they were buried in unmarked graves that disappeared over time and contributed to the richness of the soil and the unusual lushness of the old trees. (Roy, 58)

In the graveyard "several generations of Anjum's family were buried" (Roy, 58). Anjum decides to transform the discarded grave to a paradise "on her first night in the graveyard, after a quick reconnaissance, Anjum placed her godrej cupboard and her few belongings near Mulaquat Ali's grave and unrolled her carpet and bedding between Ahlam Baji's and begum Renata Mumtaz Madam's graves." (Roy, 61)

The graveyard in the outskirts of the city sheltered the drug addicts and homeless people. Yet she feels the graveyard more secure and safe. "In that setting, Anjum would ordinarily have been in some danger. But her desolation protected her. Unleashed at last from social protocol, it rose up around her in all its majesty – a fort, with ramparts, turrets, hidden dungeons and walls that hummed like an approaching mob. She rattled through its gilded chambers like a fugitive absconding from herself." (Roy, 61)

Anjum never tries to return to Khwabagh. "It took years for the tide of grief and fear to subside." (Roy, 66) Anjum undergoes great transformation. Her life in the graveyard helps her forget the oppressive patriarchal society. "Gradually the Fort of Desolation scaled down into a dwelling of manageable proportions. It became home; a place of predictable, reassuring sorrow- awful, but reliable." (Roy, 66)

The heterotopic space, the graveyard gets transformed into a paradise out of Anjum's determination. Anjum's transformation of a graveyard to a paradise is Roy's strong satire against the society that demarked Anjum as the 'other'. By opening her novel through a graveyard, Roy presents the world of the downtrodden. Anjum's paradise shelters both the living and the non-living with no rules prescribed for them. A graveyard that cremates the dead provides solace for Anjum. Anjum's Jannat accommodates the 'others' of the society. She provided space for all who approached her, be it human or non-human beings. "Anjum poured a little tea into a saucer and blew into it to cool it down for him. He slurped it up noisily. He drank everything Anjum drank, ate everything that she ate – biryani, korma, samosas, halwa, falooda, phirini, zamzam, mangoes in summer, oranges in winter. It was terrible for his body, but excellent for his soul." (Roy, 83)

Anjum never was able to accommodate herself in the patriarchal society. For her initially Khwabagh and then the graveyard offered a suitable place to shelter her psyche. "She, who never knew which box to tick, which queue to stand in, which public toilet to enter (Kings or Queens? Lords or Ladies? Sirs or Hers?). He, who believed he was always right. She, who knew she was all wrong, always wrong. He, reduced by his certainties. She, augmented by her ambiguity. He, who wanted a law. She who wanted a baby." (Roy, 122)

When Anjum and Nimmo plans to visit the city he schedule it for the night. They preferred to stay away from the crowd. Anjum also decides to dress differently.

They decided to go out at night when the crowds would be comparatively thinner. Anjum had dressed down, in one of her drabber Pathan suits, though she could not resist a hairclip, a dupatta and a touch of lipstick. Ishrat was dressed as though she was at her own wedding – in a lurid pink kurta with sequins and green Patiyala salwar. She ignored all advice to the contrary and wore bright pink lipstick and enough jewelry to light up the night. (Roy, 108)

When the documentary makers confronted her she said “we’ve come from there... from the other world.” (Roy, 110) Similar to the utility of the heterotopic spaces described by Foucault, Anjum graveyard transformed to a paradise shelters the ‘others’ like Dayanand, Saddam Husain, Tilo, Miss Jabeen the second and many Hijiras.

Another heterotopic space discussed by Roy in the novel is Shiraz cinema. It was a place where cinemas were once screened for the public and later transformed to a secret interrogation room for the intelligence.

The Shiraz cinema was the centerpiece of an enclave of barracks and officers’ quarters, cordoned off by the elaborate trappings of paranoia – two concentric rings of barbed wire sandwiching a shallow, sandy moat; the fourth and innermost ring was a high boundary wall topped with jagged shards of broken glass. The corrugated- metal gates had watchtowers on either side, manned by soldiers with machine guns. (Roy. 330)

This is a secret interrogation room for the police and army to encounter the convicts. This is also an example for the heterotopia of deviation. “Soldiers milled around, bringing prisoners in, taking others way for interrogation. The faint sounds that came through the grand wooden doors leading to the auditorium could have been the muted soundtrack of a violent film.” (Roy, 331)

Arundhati Roy, thus employs the heterotopias of deviation to console and settle the traumatic psyche of her gendered subalterns. Heterotopia is a widely accepted concept in literature. Heterotopic spaces in literature provides the author ample space to settle the traumatized psyche of the protagonists. The grave yard and Khwabagh provides Anjum a place to discover her ‘self’. She like a deep rooted tree shelters the human and non-human species. Heterotopic spaces redefines their roles and status. They no longer belong to the state of ‘other’ that the patriarchal society has doomed them. These spaces helps them to segregate and build their own world as against the hegemonic societal norms.

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