

Lavender Phrased Gender: Analysis Of LGBTQ Characters In Selected Works

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Arundhati Roy is perhaps the best example one could find in recent times, of writers who stand at the meeting point of three streams namely, grass root activism, critical and analytical approaches to feminism and imaginative representation in creative writing. She is a feminist activist and indomitable campaigner for social justice. Though she hails from a socially privileged class, she knew what wretched life the oppressed have in India. Contemporary turmoil disturbs her mind and her imaginative faculty often takes wild and novel turns. All that has been hidden, silenced and erased are celebrated in her recent novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Khaled Hosseini is one of the most widely read and beloved novelists in the world with over thirty eight billion copies of his books sold in more than seventy countries. His recent novel *And The Mountains Echoed* is a familial saga set in Afghanistan. Both novels is a brew of silenced and erased.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness and *And The Mountains Echoed* are two recent novels set in contemporary society which is boiling and raging with internal and external political turmoil. This Paper analyses LGBT characters depicted in these works. Was LGBT characters necessary in these novels? Or were they a mere trope in the entire plot? Or was LGBT issues dealt as a taboo? It is important to answer these questions because LGBT persons were traditionally depicted as deviant or not straight concepts in media and literature. If we analyze films of last decade most mysterious psycho killers turned out to be either a transgender or a homosexual. LGBT persons were portrayed as child abusers and psycho killers, that means not normal category. I strongly believe that contemporary writers have an accountability for the pseudo portrayal of LGBT community. Both novelists approaches their work with zeal of visionary carrying over their shoulders the burden of their ancestral sins, they are like Pilgrims ready to wade into the celestial waters to wash the sins of many lifetimes. So it is important to analyze how they

depicted LGBT characters in their works because billions of readers would internalize the portrayal and take their representation for granted.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness projects a Hijra, transgender as the central character. The term transgender is used to describe a broad range of people who experience or express their gender somewhat differently from what people expect. Transgender is an umbrella term that encompasses all gender variant identities like transsexuals, transvestites, cross dressers. Khaled Hosseini in *And The Mountains Echoed* projects the theme of homosexuality. Even though both novels are not about LGBT strives it is important to dissect such a theme here. Roy quite evidently uses regional flavor of language to express the transgender strives where as Hosseini deals with homosexuality as an unspoken secret to be closeted.

Language is a powerful tool to project the covert and overt intentions. Roy here used the language to express the transgender strife and unique experience without stigmatizing. Whereas Hosseini used his language power to hide the homosexual theme. He never explicitly says the word homosexual or gay. He depicted homosexuality as a taboo by conscious reluctance to project gay lexicons and language. Roy realized that the existing heteronormative and heterosexist language is not enough to convey transgender unique experience. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* Mulaqat Ali a character who finds different couplets to explain each situation fails to find a couplet when he realizes that his son is a transgender.

“When Jahanara Begum told him about Aftab, perhaps for the first time in his life Mulaqat Ali had no suitable couplet for the occasion”(The Ministry 16)

Often existing language which works on binaries are incompatible to express something unique. it is at this point that the language of LGBT community heeds the call. Does LGBT persons think and express in this heteronormative and heterosexist language? Or does their language has a uniqueness?

Lavender linguistics is a sub branch of sociolinguistics and deals with the language of individuals belonging to LGBT community. Besides the analysis of this language use, Lavender linguistics also includes research on heteronormative and heterosexist language and lexical items used to refer to sexual orientations. It is important to know about this branch because these writers does not belong to LGBT community. But for readers it is the voice and language of these characters that gives the characters their identity. This paper analyses the thrust of language that shaped the identity of LGBT characters in both novels.

Roy’s novel begins with a passage that describes the twilight, where the sun has gone but light has not, where bats left and Crows returned. This passage introduces the theme of void or loss in a much poetic way.

“at magic hour, when the sun has gone but light has not, armies of flying foxes unhinge themselves from the Banyan trees in the old graveyard and drift across the city like smoke. When the bats leave, the Crows come home. Not all the din of their homecoming fills the silence left by the sparrows have gone missing, and the old white-backed Vultures, custodians of the dead for more than a hundred million years, that have been wiped out.”(The Ministry 1)

This passage is exuberant with the idea of void that the loss has left. Bats leaving, sun setting leaves us with a sense of void created by their loss. But even though they disappear they leaves behind some aura of existence. Even though sun has left it left behind some light. When Bats left, it accommodated some Crows. So the leaving and coming has left a strainful void. This strain or tension is a clue of the eminent physical and mental conflict to take place in the story.

In the first chapter itself Roy introduces the protagonist, a transgender. Roy describes Anjum as a “female trapped in man’s body”(The Ministry 16). So there is a void left by the incomplete female and incomplete man in her. That incompleteness of sexuality or the unusual blend of the heterosexuality in Anjum has created a tension that pulls the two selves residing in Anjum. It is the language that gives power to Anjum to establish his unique identity. Anjum says

“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.”(The Ministry 4)

Mulaqat Ali , Anjums father tries to construct masculine nature in Anjum through the cultural project of inculcating manliness with the help of existing binary language.

“He cut down on the household expenses and drew up lists of people and relatives from whom he could borrow money. Simultaneously, he embarked on the cultural project of inculcating manliness in Aftab. He passed on to him his love of poetry and discouraged the singing of Thumri and Chaiti. He stayed up late into the night, telling Aftab stories about their warrior ancestors and their valour on the battlefield.. They left Aftab unmoved. But when he heard the story of how Temujin –Changez Khan-won the hand of his beautiful wife, Borte Khatun, how she was kidnapped by a rival tribe and how Temujin fought a whole army virtually single-handedly to get her back because he loved her so much, Aftab found himself wanting to be her.”(17)

Here the father tries to construct masculinity by the power of language. It is through the masculine themes and folklores that he tries to inculcate manliness in

Anjum. But Anjum seeks the same power of language to reaffirm his identity from the myriad of masculine themes and lexicons, Anjum focus on the instinct that is latent in him, his desire to complete the incompleteness of female within him. Anjum is totally mesmerised by the story of Borte Khatun. It is the feminine language that satisfied the female fantasy in Anjum through depiction of Borte Khatun's beauty and elegance. "Aftab found himself wanting to be her (17). Aftab changed his name to Anjum once he realized his transgender identity. From that moment onward the author also ceases the dead name. This is how a writer should impart respect through language. Roy has done a wonderful task of shattering the negative stereotypes through her language.

Khaled Hosseini's *And The Mountains Echoed* is not a single story, but several threads of stories weaved within each other. The stories are thoughtful and engaging. There are too many characters and too many cohesive stories in breadth without depth. The breadth of characters and stories faded the unique voice of characters. Almost all the characters have same voice, they all sounded similar and say things in similar manner. Having too many characters made the task of developing a unique voice for each character rather murky. But each and every character has a void that they are desperately seeking to fill. Just like the breadth of characters themes also ranges from cultural memory, parentage, homosexuality and national conflicts. Homosexuality as a theme is quite evident but not so explicitly expressed by the author. Homosexuality is depicted as a taboo that needs to be closeted.

Suleiman Wahdati and Nabi, the master and chauffer has an elusive connection. Mr Wahdati is a gay and loves Nabi. Nabi is portrayed as more feminine in essence. Nabi's language and voice is that of a female. Nabi is depicted as able to do all stereotyped domestic chores like cooking, cleaning, moping and all. Nabi is rather a homemaker. Nabi's dominant nature is that of submissiveness, Nabi says he always abided by the wish of Wahdati.

" Mr Wahdati did have for instance, a habit of correcting my manner of speech with an air of superiority that could be interpreted, perhaps not wrongly, as arrogance."(And The Mountains 101)

Hosseini consciously or unconsciously brought a stigma on the homosexuals. Since we are raised to think of a relationship in male-female role terms, people assume these roles are emulated in a same sex relationship. People might assume there is a female(passive) and male(dominant) role in same sex relationship . These sorts of ideas about relationship roles are stupid. Hosseini knowingly or unknowingly made Nabi feminine and Mr Wahdati Masculine in order to work out

the homosexual element. Hence the patchwork done but Hosseini lost the charm of truth and characters could never find their unique voice.

Transgender and homosexual depicted in both novels of contemporary authors warrants a dissection. LGBT strives and issues needs the heed. when we analyze the past representation of LGBT characters in literature, they were either a farcial element or a psycho. Societies have been intolerant to LGBT communities. They have been classified as different ,abnormal or wrong. This fear or hatred arises from the culturally constructed ideas of what is normal. So those who do not fit the heteronormative norm are assumed to be not straight.

Language can be an incredible tool for change. Language posses such a power that it can be used to inspire billions and to conquer the entire nation. As linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf said a language shapes the basic idea of man. As a champion of justice roy has utilized her powerful language to reduce heterosexual bias there by increasing the visibility of LGBT persons. Throughout the novel Roy employed clarity of expression and avoidance of inaccurate stereotypes on developing the character of Anjum. Roy never brought stigma on transgender as portraying or calling them as sexual deviant or sexual invert.

There is only a little research on transgender representation in cinema and novels. Most studies on the LGBT persons focus on the medical aspects of gender identity. LGBT representation and depiction needs equal focus because people often deeply internalize such depiction and take for granted depiction thinking this is the way things are. LGBT characters rather than a mere spicy trope should be given a respectable identity. It is the task of contemporary writers to avoid heteronormative bias in their language in order to wipeout fear and hatred common people have for varied sexual orientations.

Works cited

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