

“In the Supermarket of Sorrow”: Melancholic Heteroglossia of the Other India in Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

Dr. Ph.Sanamacha Sharma

Assistant Professor
DM College of Commerce
Dhanamanjuri University

Abstract

Arundhati Roy in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* employs the open-ended flexibility of novel genre to bring in multiplicity of social voices to critique the new India with its centripetal forces of neoliberalism and fascist religion. Using Bakhtin’s method of discourse in the novel, this paper analyses four main centrifugal discourses connected with several characters, including doubled-voice authorial-narrator. These ideological positions show vulnerable spots in the story of the great Indian democracy. Despite revealing a heteroglossic narrative which connects marginalized voices, one questions the ideological positions they have taken. It points towards the failure of dialogue or the need for one. One also investigates the possibility of novelistic narrative fiction becoming a site of shelter rather than a tool of real activism in the political language of nation-state.

Key Words: Heteroglossia, double-voiced discourse, hegemony, dialogization.

1. The novelistic structure of Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) provides a multiplicity of social voices, their various links and interrelationships, opening for the entry of heteroglossia and the need for dialogization. The model of heteroglossia rests on the images of speaking persons, which enters the novel as the fully embodied image of an author, or narrators or, as characters. In “Discourse of the Novel”, M.M Bakhtin states that “the decisive and distinctive importance of the novel as a genre” comes from the fact that “the human being in the novel is first, foremost and always a speaking human being. With the help of novelistic narrative, these speaking persons bring with them “their own unique ideological discourse, their own language.” (Bakhtin 332) Novels do not indulge in a purposeless verbal show. A character’s discourse always offers a particular way of viewing the world, and this worldview comes with the struggle for a social significance. Persons in novel do not simply speak, they also act. Ideology and the character’s discourse motivate their action. Their words and action are “associated with an ideological motif and occupies a definite ideological position. The action and individual act of a character in a novel are essential in order to expose – as well as to test- his ideological position, his discourse.” (Bakhtin 334).
2. I find four main conflicting discourses connected with several speaking and acting persons in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. They are exposed and tested in the course of the narrative. I club together Anjum, Tilottama, Saddam, Zainab, Ustad Kulsoom Bi,

Nimmo, etc. in the first one (despite their specific differences) as they belong to the discourses of the marginalized minority, or rather, the vulnerable, fragile sections of society. The second one is Musa Yeswi, the student from Kashmir, who studied at Architecture School in Delhi and later became a wanted Kashmir insurgent demanding a separate Kashmir. I put him in a separate discourse as his voice is interlocked with Kashmir insurgency, so different from that of Anjum, Hussain, Tilottma or the abandoned kid from Maoist central India. Biplab Dasgupta (the landlord) and Naga (the Kashmir correspondent) are put in the third one, the discourse of the upper caste (or class), with their impotent sympathy for the marginalized. The fourth one is that of the authorial discourse which is scattered all over the narrative and it reminds us every moment of Arundhati Roy the activist, rather than the story-teller. All of these discourses launch a diatribe against the new India which is shaping in the grand monological pattern of BJP ideology and all-pervading capitalist consumer values and seek a (im)possibility of dialogization.

3. What is this new India which the novelist is so critical of? The new India about which, the characters, a bunch of marginalized misfits, feel so unsafe, so hopeless, so full of despair? Saeeda, who knew English and easily switched between traditional salwar kameez and jeans, remarked, 'The exotics didn't suit the image of the New India – a nuclear power and an emerging destination for international finance.' (38) Evidence of *Shining India, Feeling Good*, is everywhere. 'Our Time Is Now. Kmart was coming, Walmart and Starbucks were coming, and in the British Airways advertisement on TV, the People of the World (white, brown, black, yellow) all chanted the Gayatri Mantra.' (97) Now "the People of the World bowed low and joined their palms in greating, *Namaste*." "In their sleep India's favourite citizens smiled back. *India! India!* they chanted in their dreams, like the crowds at cricket matches...*India! India!* The world rose to its feet, roaring its appreciation. Skycrapers and steel factories sprang up where forests used to be, rivers were bottled and sold in supermarkets, fish were tinned, mountains mined and turned into shining missiles. Massive dams lit up the cities like Christmass trees. Everyone was happy." (96-97) "The TV channels never ran out of sponsorship for their live telecasts of despair. They never ran out of despair." (99) "And people (who counted as people) said to one another, 'You don't have to go abroad for shopping any more. Imported things are available here now. See, like Bombay is our New York, Delhi is our Washington and Kashmir is our Switzerland. It's like really like *saala* fantastic *yaar*.'" (99) Even, toys with *Mera Bharat Mahan* are available. (100) This is the new India advertised to the world at large. It is also true for the educated rising middle-class who can happily be a part of it.
4. The new powerful India is reflected in the changing status of Delhi, the capital, in the map of the world. India became "supercapital of the world's favourite new superpower" and "It was the summer Grandma became a whore".(96) Beside, consumer advancement and growing military strength, India, leaving behind the Nehruvian fantasy of separating religion and politics, is turning into a Hindu nation. The Poet-Prime Minister along with senior ministers who admired Hitler wanted to declare India a Hindu nation like Islamic Republic of Pakistan and equated the Indian Muslim with that of the German Jews. (41) Hostility towards Muslims grew up. Anjum was caught in the Gujarat riot and was later found taking shelter in a small refugee camp inside a mosque on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. India is riding on what Arundhati Roy talks of in *An Ordinary Person's*

Guide to Empire, “the dangerous cross-currents of neoliberal capitalism and communal neo-fascism” (229), which act as centralizing, centripetal forces. The largest Democracy of the world is nothing but demon-crazy. In the section called “Nativity”, Roy creates the Jantar Mantar scene, “where different people from different disturbed parts of India were on some sort of Protest and Resistance “ (110). Anjum, Saddam Hussain and Ustad Hameed came there “to see for themselves what the ‘Second Freedom Struggle’ the TV channels had been broadcasting was all about.” (107) The ground reality of Indian democracy is that it is a breeding ground of scams:

The summer of the city’s resurrection had also been the summer of scams – coal scams, iron-ore scams, housing scams, insurance scams, stamp-paper scams, phone-license scams, land scams, dam scams, irrigation scams, arms and ammunition scams, petrol-pump scams, polio-vaccine scams, electricity-bill scams, school-boo scams, god-men scams, drought-relief scams, car-number-plate scams, voter-list scams, identity-card scams—in which politicians, businessmen, businessmen-politicians and politician-businessmen had made off with unimaginable quantities of public money. (101-2)

5. To critique the discourse of Indian democracy, the novelist uses a group of marginalized people (Anjum, Tilottama, Saddam, Dr Azad Bhartiya, etc), people from the other India, as decentralizing, centrifugal voices, and develops a counter-discourse. The prospering New India has forgotten the lives of the have-nots and powerless. As a result, the novelist wrote, “In slums and squatter settlements, in resettlement colonies and ‘unauthorized’ colonies, people fought back.” (98) “Hum doori, duniya se aaye hain,” Anjum said significantly: “We’ve come from there...from the other world.” (110) That’s how, the discourses of dissent start. Sometimes, they are also presented as the marginal of the marginalized. Given their ordinary existence, their political consciousness can be said to be highly active. They are, in fact, terribly disturbed individuals, social misfits, like the novelist wants us to see that if one is looking for the lost garden of humanity, one can find in them only.
6. First, let me deal with Anjum. S/he was born as Aftab, to a Muslim family in Shahjahanabad, the walled city of Delhi. Soon it became clear that he was a Hijra – a female trapped in a male body. His father’s “cultural project of inculcating manliness” in him by telling “about their warrior ancestors and their valour on the battlefield” (17) did not work on him. Their visit to a ‘sexologist’ was also futile. Ultimately, his ‘Hijra tendencies’ led him to the Khwabgah – the House of Dreams – the residence of the Hijras, where he was given the name Anjum and became a member of Hijra community, the marginalized group. He was happy there as he found his right place in the scheme of social identification. Over the years she became Delhi’s most famous Hijra. (26) Later, she found Zainab, an abandoned three years old baby on the steps on Jama Masjid and the Khwabgah took her in. The baby brought out her maternal instinct and she made her call her “Mummy”. Now, ‘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.’ (30) After Zainab started going to school, she went through a series of persistent illness. On the advice of the Khadim, she visited the dargah of Hazrat Gharib Nawaz in Ajmer for the protection and good health of Zainab. On the way she was caught in the horror of Hindu-

Muslim riot. Two months later, she was found in a champ in Gujarat and came back to the Khwabgah a changed person. A fear psychosis troubled her and she had problem living the old life and following the old routine of the place. Ustad Kulsoom Bi, the head of the household, said the Khwabgah was meant for “special people, *blessed* people” who came there with “their dreams that could not be realized in the Duniya,” and it was the place where “Holy souls trapped in the wrong bodies were liberated.”(53) Anjum lost her trust in these words of liberation and one day she left the place Khwabgah and started living alone in a graveyard where several generation of her family were buried. After witnessing the horror of riot, she thinks that the world is not safe at all. S/he chooses the graveyard behind the government hospital as her dwelling place. It seems to say “Shame to Indian Democracy.” The only safe place in this great People’s Government is the graveyard.

7. Anjum’s peculiar discourse is that she is neither male nor female, only belonging to the fringe of the society as “the forgotten ones” (51) since the time of Ram. Of course, during Mughal time, they were members of the staff of the Royal Palace. She was a Hijra yet she left the Khwabgah. She was a Muslim yet not a Muslim. She was not killed during the riot because she was a Hijra. Killing a Hijra brought bad luck. Though she was spared, the horror got to her. She could not forget the words “Only one place for the Mussalman! The Graveyard or Pakistan.” (62) She chose the graveyard. When the municipal served a notice that squatters were prohibited from living in the graveyard, she said ‘she wasn’t living in the graveyard, she was dying in it.’ (67) She built a guest house there and called it Jannat, Paradise, (68). Setting up a guest house in the burial place and calling it Jannat is a protest against the world, or more specifically, to India, that was turning into Hindu fundamentalists. Later, it also functioned as a funeral parlour. Even though it was doing well, Anjum knew that ‘this place where we live, where we have made our home, is the place for falling people. Here there is no *haqeeqat*. *Arre*, even *we* aren’t real. We don’t really exist.’ (84) The peculiarity of the life of a Hijra is expressed better by Nimmo, another Hijra, who said that the causes of the unhappiness of the regular people were “Price-rise, children’s school-admissions, husbands’ beatings, wives’ cheatings, Hindu-Muslim riots, Indo-Pak war- outside things that settle down eventually. But for us (Hijras) the price-rise and school-admissions and beating-husbands and cheating-wives are all inside us. The riot is inside us. The war is inside us. Indo-Pak is inside us. It will never settle down. It can’t’. (23)
8. S. Tillottama: her discourse is that of a hard-core rebel, ready to challenge every establishment in her silent, indirect ways. A South Indian girl. A passed out from Architecture School in Delhi. Her background is given in a vague manner: an oddball, who wore second-hand clothes, smoked Ganesh beedis, (153) lived in a shack in a nearby slum, “she paid her fees by working in architects’ offices as a draughtsman after college hours and on weekends and holidays.’ (155) a woman with a troubled past, born out of “a scandal, a lover affair in a small town” in Kerala, involving a man from “Untouchable” caste and a woman from the high-caste Syrian Christian family. Left in the orphanage first, then, adopted by the mother later, for which, her own family disowned her. Never going home for holidays or nobody came looking for her. After her graduation, she worked as a junior architect and “she upgraded herself from the slum an rented a ramshackle room near the dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya,” (158) living in the

seedy neighbourhood with beggar-line lanes. She said she wasn't marrying anybody and "she wanted to be free to die irresponsibly, without notice and for no reason." (159) Yet she married Naga, her old friend, a fiery Leftist during college, now a part of mainstream journalism, a puppet of the Bureau. The marriage didn't last long because she married Naga mistaking him as "a campaigning journalist, seeker of justice, scourge of the establishment that killed the man she loved." (182) She did not belong to any specific religion or people yet her heart beat for Musa, a Kashmiri Muslim, a fellow Architect student, and the fact that Musa has become a Kashmir militant does not deter her from going to meet him in Kashmir. Of course, the novelist, by sending her to Kashmir to look for Musa, gets to the heart of messy violent Kashmir.

9. Tilo "didn't - couldn't think of anybody as 'her people' " (358) but later she thought of Musa as "her people" till they went separate ways. Then, she took in the baby abandoned on the Jantar Mantar pavement and it belonged to a woman "rumoured to be a Front organization for the banned Maoist Party that was fighting a guerrilla war in the forests of Central India." It is a symbol of her rebellion, her dissent, her support of the Maoist cause in Central India. Anjum's view is "the mother must have left here thinking as I did, that this place is today's Karbala, where the battle for justice, the battle of good against evil, is being fought." (117) At the end of the story, Tilo considers the residents of Jannat Guest House as "her people", the place of falling (or fallen) people, and she knew that she might have finally "found a home for the Rest of Her Life." (305). Ironically, she escaped from the blood-ridden Kashmiri trap because of her friends (Biplab Dasgupta, the man in the Bureau, and Naga, the journalist, a puppet of the Bureau). Her decision not to stay back in Kashmir, not even for the sake of Musa, is questionable. She has gone to Kashmir for Musa and she does not care at all what Musa is fighting against or for. They are brought together by the kind of alienation they both share in the centre, that's the capital. They both come from the margin. But it cannot be said they belong to the weak, deprived and marginalized group. They have their chance of making something out of their education. They do not do it. From the very beginning she identifies with him. Even when, he has become a militant she accepts him (along with his Kashmiri insurgency discourse) too. Is not that why we find both sleeping together in a room in Jannat house? Isn't that why a part of the name of the abandoned child is given the name of the dead child of Musa? The irony is that, In the last minute, when it comes to saving her skin, she falls back on Biplab or Naga. She does not bother to thank them for it. Does she take it for granted? In the similar ironical manner, Anjum, who was caught in the Hindu-Muslim, was left untouched because she was a Hijra, neither a female, nor a male, neither a Hindu nor a Muslim (though s/he was born to a Muslim family).
10. Dr Azad Bhartiya (The Free Indian) protesting alone on Jantar Manter is anti-Hindu because of Hindu's caste system. He said "I am everything except for a Hindu. As an Azad Bhartiya, I can tell you openly that I have renounced the faith of the majority of the people in this country only for this reason." He gives an over-simplistic view that one is corrupt because one is a Hindu. Does it mean that others who belong to other religions are not corrupt? Hindu as the faith of the majority is being questioned. In "India's Minorities: Who Are They? What Do They Want?", Myron Weiner brings up the issue of majority-minority concept by quoting Theodore Wright (he argued that to say the Hindus are a majority is totally wrong) and states minority and majority status is a matter of self-

ascription as well as objective definition. A majority from one view is a minority from another angle. Then, is Hindu the only cause for failure in governance? “These are the Latur earthquake victims whose cash compensation has been eaten up by corrupt collectors and tehsildars. Out of three crore rupees only three lakh rupees reached the people, 3 per cent. The rest was eaten by cockroach people on the way... India is ruled by donkeys, vultures and pigs.” (131) “These donkeys, vultures and pigs” are Hindus? He is “fighting for a better world in this Democracy zoo. Foreigners only see what they want to see. Earlier it was snake charmers and sadhus, now it is the superpower things, the Bazaar Raj. We sit here like caged animals, and the government feeds us useless little pieces of hope through the bars of this iron railing... We tell our stories. For a while that lightens our burden. This is how they control us.” (132) In short, the Free Indian is not free at all. No doubt, communalism weakens plurality and diversity. Caste system only strengthens the ancient Brahmanical social order. As a result, both communalism and the caste system are threats to the democratic polity.

11. Musa Yeswi’s case is a different discourse. His attack on Indian democracy comes from a different angle. The kind of Azadi heard in Kashmir Valley is different from the kind of azadi (the second independence), of protest and resistance, dreamt of on the pavement of Jantar Mantar. Unlike the case of Anjum and Tillottama, with Musu the question of insurgency and separate Kashmir comes into the picture. A Kashmiri Muslim, Tillottama’s classmate at Architecture School. After graduation from Architecture School, Musa and Tilo drifted apart. Musa returned to Kashmir where “death was everything. Career. Desire. Dream.” (314) and graveyards, “as common as multi-story parking lots”. (319) After the death of his innocent family when soldiers turned their machine guns towards the unarmed crowd during the procession of a dead militant leader, he chose violence and became a wanted militant. Then, “Kashmir had swallowed him and he was now part of its entrails.” (344) Proxy war is going on in Kashmir Valley. Battle is going on between Indian army and Islamic militants. There is total absence of trust in the relationship between the state and the civil society. The strategy of gaining hegemony over the civil society is not working. The coercive power of the state and its ideological apparatus have failed to win the consent of the Kashmiris. India is still struggling to establish its authority and legitimacy. The novelist expresses the radical dissent of the people, particularly, the young men, this way:

They wore their anguish like armour, their anger slung across their bodies like ammunition belts. At that moment, perhaps because they were thus armed, or because they had decided to embrace a life of death, or because they knew they were already dead, they became invincible. (329)

The novelist gives a glimpse of Musa’s unspoken thought when interrogated by Major Amrik Singh. “*Duplicity is the only weapon we have. You don’t know how radiantly we smile when our hearts are broken... You have no idea how warmly we can welcome you when all we really want is for you to go away.*” (335-36, italic, not mine). It expresses the hidden Kashmiri psyche which may be equated with the collective sentiment of most Kashmiris when they are up against persistent State coercion. It also points towards the resistance against the hegemony of Indian democracy. Fissure appears in their resistance too. Insurgents were fighting and dying in thousands for freedom, and at the same time

they were trying to get cheap loans from the very government they were fighting. Musa's own self-criticism is stark. "We're a valley of idiots and schizophrenics, and we are fighting for the freedom of the idiotic..." (359) Self-pity has invaded their mind and Musa talked of dignity and dreamt of consolidating as a single force in a rather hopeless manner.

12. Biplab Dasgupta (the landlord) is put in the third one, the discourse of the upper caste (or class), cold rational voice of Indian government with impotent sympathy for the marginalized. Many of the characters in the narrative seem to believe in revolution (protestors in Jantar Mantar and their hope of 'second independence', Musu and Kashmir freedom, Dr. Azad Bhartiya). The emotional highway of main narrative voices (Anjum, Tilottama, Musa, Azad Bhartiya), is counterpointed by the sober analysis of Biplab Dasgupta. He is aware of the impossibility or redundancy of the old idea of freedom. "Times had changed. By the time I was born the British were gone, we were free country. How could they name a baby 'Revolution'?" (180) He is introduced as the landlord, aka, Garson Hobart, the man in the Bureau, a Brahmin in Delhi, a friend-cum-secret lover of S. Tilottama. Stating clear about his pro-India, pro-government position, he said it gave him "great pride to be a servant of the Government of India." (147) He dismissed "those grumbling intellectuals and professional dissenters who constantly carp about this great country," and asserted that "they can only do it because they are allowed to. And they are allowed to because, for all our imperfections, we are a genuine democracy." (147) His perspective on Indian democracy is that of the majority, the moderate Hindu voice, not that of the radical "the saffron tide of Hindu Nationalism" (165). He is critical of his colleagues in the Bureau who don't see "the difference between religious faith and patriotism," and want "a sort of Hindu Pakistan. Most of them are conservative, closet Brahmins who wear their sacred threads inside their safari suits, and their sacred ponytails dangling down the inside of their vegetarian skulls. They tolerate me only because I am a fellow Twice-born." (147)
13. The gap in the relationship between the landlord (Biplab) and Tilottama indicates the relationship between the majority and the minority, "the chasm that separated my life from hers." (159) Even if she had reciprocated his feelings, his parents, his Brahmin parents, would never accept her, "the girl without a past, without a caste – into the family." (161) Regarding Kashmir, he said it was an "absurd notion that Kashmir could have 'freedom' " though it swept "a whole generation of young Kashmiri men." (160) "The inbuilt idiocy, this idea of jihad" (170) coming from Pakistan and Afghanistan has turned Kashmir into a war zone where eight or nine versions of the "True" Islam battled out. Something bad happened to Musa's family but Biplab thought he "would never contemplate doing what he did" (160), that's, turning into a militant. He dismantles the idea of jihad by remarking that that some of the most radical among them – "those who preach against the idea of nationalism and in favour of the great Islamic Ummah – are actually on our payroll." (170) Now what fuels it is nothing but self-aggrandising capitalist idea. "The only thing that keeps Kashmir from self-destructing like Pakistan and Afghanistan is good old petit bourgeois capitalism. For all their religiosity, Kashmiris are great businessmen. And all businessmen eventually, one way or another, have a stake in the status quo – or what we call the 'Peace Process'... is an entirely different kind of business opportunity from peace itself." (170) Many of jihadis were young, "a whole

generation virtually committed suicide.’ (171) Many of them were opportunists, “mostly extortionists and petty criminals who had joined the militancy when they saw profit in that endeavour, and were the first to cylinder (*surrender*) when the going get rough.’ (172) “Everybody on all sides is making money on the bodies of young Kashmiris.” (228) They do not want the militancy to end. Biplab’s view is that ‘if you put four Kashmir in a room and ask them to specify what exactly they mean by Azadi... they would probably end up slitting each other’s throats.’ (181) His conclusion: it is “a war that can never be won or lost, a war without end.’ (181)

14. The fourth one is the double-voiced discourses of the novelist, or the novelist-narrator with two voices, two meanings and two expressions. The authorial speech runs through the narrative prominently: angry, dissatisfied, eloquently self-pitiful, vulnerable, critical, poetical yet overtly political. Taking on an anti-capitalist-pro-poor, anti-majority-pro-minority stands, the authorial voice, in many passages, overtakes the voices of the characters and sometimes this authorial discourse becomes too direct, thus, confusing the reader whether it is the activist talking or the novelist. In the section named “The Nativity”, she assembles several voices of discontent and anger from all over India in one place, Jantar Mantar, for the Second Freedom Struggle, to show that democracy has become a sort of Demon-crazy : the “tubby old Gandhian with his corruption-free India protest and others, including Gujarat ka lalla, who came there to take advantage of it; activists representing “ thousands of farmers and indigenous tribespeople whose land had been appropriated by the government”; the Delhi Kabaadi-Wallahs; Manipuri nationalist asking for revocation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act; Tibetan refugees calling for a free Tibet; Association of Mothers of the Disappeared in the war for freedom in Kashmir; protesters shouting about the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits; signature campaigning for the release of political prisoners connected with the banned Maoist Party in the forests of Central India.
15. “What are the avenues of protest available to people who wish to resist empire?” Arundhati Roy asks in the section “public power in the age of empire” in *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire*. She is not satisfied “only to *express* dissent, but to effectively force change.” (299) She further says that she is “not an activist, nor the leader of any mass movement.., (nor) the ‘voice of the voiceless’” (330). She is a writer who represents only herself. She is worried that “it is not merely justice itself, but the *idea* of justice that is under attack.” (331) Has writing novel become an act of activism for her? About writing this story, she said in *the Guardian*, “it would be unapologetically complicated, unapologetically political and unapologetically intimate.” Even though, her story is a voice(s) of dissent, even though she believes “in the power of narrative” (interview, *the Guardian*) but it is hard to believe that she believes in literature’s ability to be a big force of political change. Yet it is a fact that her story cannot help in participating “in the international supermarkets of grief.” (115) She uses the flexibility of novel genre and brings in many elements to her narrative: anecdotes, press clippings, some diary entries, a series of witness testimonies, jokes, questionnaires, some sort of A-Z Kashmiri-English Alphabet. Such diverse structures no doubt disrupt the traditional unity of the novel but it also allows its meanings to remain open-ended and dialogical rather than close and monological. Providing solution is another matter but she has at least addressed the overwhelming complexity of India by showing us a multiplicity of social voices and their

various links and interrelationships where all languages “are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically.” (Bakhtin 291-292)

16. Explaining heteroglossia in novel, Bakhtin cites only comic and parodic novels, but Arundhati’s novel is neither comic nor parodic. Her ironically titled *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a melancholic novel, a sort of grievance cell filled with voices of lament, tirades and complaints, or in the novelist’s words, “live telecasts of despair”. (99) “People – communities, castes, races and even countries – carry their tragic histories and their misfortunes around like trophies, or like stock, to be bought and sold on the open market.” (195) Is her story another live telecast of despair? One wonders. One important question is: Is dialogue possible if you have withdrawn in the morbid security of the isolated graveyard? Is this the only place left to practice resistance and protest? Can one begin the second revolution from there? Most of the main characters end up in Jannat Guest house built in a graveyard like it is a sort of politically neutral ground but it is not. It also cannot be the solution to the problem of human existence. Graveyard, literally, a burial place, the end, or symbolically, the burial place of the psychologically dead or dying), not the beginning. Is the author by assembling them taking a position where they can’t be defeated or questioned? Shame on democracy, it has reduced them to that. So only fit to be pitied. But the writer is more complicated than this. She is aware of the dead-end intricacies of “Pity cannot be the core of ethics” (Nietzsche) vs “Pity is the supreme weevil virtue” (Schopenhauer) vs “Why should we be moral.” (Socrates). (214)
17. The novel is not “a shattered story”, but shattered stories. Tilo (or the novelist) thinks that one can tell it by not “slowly/ becoming/ everybody” but “by slowly becoming everything.” (436) The novelist tries to achieve by bringing all shattered people from all different troubled parts of India to Jantar Mantar. But one cannot become everybody and everything so long as the war inside the mind comes to an end. Besides, democracy is an unfinished project, an on-going experiment. It cannot be for everyone and everybody. It can only try to be. In its attempt to be as inclusive as possible, there will be, has to be, a continuous dialogue between the consenting and dissenting forces. Anjum said that ‘this place where we live, where we have made our home, is the place for falling people. Here there is no haqeeqat. Arre, even we aren’t real. We don’t really exist.’ (84) The question is: if you are not real, how can you s/he thought that “things would turn out all right in the end” (438) It probably means that the present scenario (of neoliberalism and fascist religion) has not given them the opportunity for their participation in the democratic process, so they are as good as non-entity. It also means that they want to be something, socially significant, real and visible. What is the kind of hope s/he has seen in Miss Udaya Jebeen? Justice? Only because she was found on the Jantar Mantar pavement, on the day of the protest and resistance, the cry for the second Independence Day? War is not simply going on outside, it is going on inside us also, and the story is about a war which can never be settled. Maybe for this reason, the novelist says “novels can bring their authors to the brink of madness. Novels can shelter their authors, too.” If it is about shelter, fine. But, as an effective force of change? Doubtful. In the graveyard Anjum is doing well – emotionally, psychologically and economically, though in an illegal sort of way. At the

end, Anjum realizes that dying cannot be another way of living. With the presence of Miss Udaya Jebeen (a mixture of Maoist and Kashmiri Jihad), she has to hope for a better way of living. One has to rethink about parading one's own misfortune because, as Biplab (or the novelist?) sarcastically points out, "people – communities, castes, races and even countries – carry their tragic histories and their misfortunes around like trophies, or like stock, to be bought and sold on the open market." (195)

WORK CITED

- Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Pinnacle Learning: New Delhi, 2014. 1981 (1st pub), 2014.
- Roy, Arundhati. *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*. Penguin: India. 2006 (1st Pub), 2007.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Hamish Hamilton: UK. 2017.
- Roy, Arundhati. "Literature provides shelter. That's why we need it." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/13/arundhati-roy-literature-shelter-pen-america>.
- Roy, Arundhati. Interview by Gary Younge. *The Guardian*. 31 May 2019.
- Weiner, Myron. "India's Minorities: Who Are They? What Do They Want?" (459-495) in *State and Politics in India*. Ed. Partha Chatterjee, OUP: New Delhi. 1997 (1st Pub). 2010.