



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Study Of Motherhood In Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness*

Dr. Binita Kumari

Independent Research Scholar

&

Dr. Nibha Singh

Professor & Former Head

P. G. Dept. of English & Research Centre

Magadh University, Bodh Gaya

ABSTRACT

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is the second voluminous novel by Booker Prize awardee Arundhati Roy. The novel stretches upon various socio-economic and political themes with plethora of lively and named characters. Motherhood is a synonymous term and experience for woman. Being a biological mother is a natural role for woman, but motherhood is a social construct like gender. Motherhood is often considered a parameter to measure and judge woman for her perfection and being an ideal woman. Transgender can also be good mothers and can embrace motherhood by adoption. Woman, if she prefers to foster a child and discards to give birth to any biological child, she ought not to be judged in the wrong light. Giving birth to a baby and rearing a child are two different aspects of motherhood. In this article our endeavor would be to study various characters and circumstances that depict these culture and gender treatment of women and motherhood in Roy's second novel. The gender stereotype role of mother and motherhood has been delineated by the author in very lucid form with objective approach and least biasness. Transgender mother and mother of a transgender child, single parent mother, mother who adopts and aborts her own foetus, appear as characters in this novel to be analyzed critically. In the light of various theories we will study about motherhood in this research article in detail.

Keywords: Motherhood, Gender Discrimination, Stereotype, Identity crisis, Feminism, Maculinity.

Indian women writing in English, now is not a relatively new phenomenon. It is rapidly gaining relevance by the indelible imprints left by the works of writers such as Kamla Markandaya, Kiran Desai, Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande etc. All these writers deal with the tribulations that a woman has to

undergo primarily in the male-dominated Indian society but the works of Arundhati Roy does not simply voice the restrictions imposed upon a woman. She deals with a wide range of issues like identity crisis, personal fulfilment, inter and intrapersonal relationships, gender stereotypes, feminism, etc. In recent decades, women's role and participation in a family and society has been altered a lot. However, the traditional role of a woman as wife and mother still hold the same expectations and similar challenges. Women being considered modern are also loaded with multiple roles of a woman as wife, cook, maid, washerwoman, nanny, baby sitter, event planner, home manager, mother, etc. which sometimes results in stress and conflict. Institutional barriers for women in general still exists that also needs to be taken away along with certain stereotypes. By the term stereotype, we mean about the features ascribed to individuals depending upon their association with a social group. Stereotyping has created difference between men and women with regard to various traits that can be associated among them. Stereotype can be defined as:

Learned, widely shared, socially validated general beliefs about categories of individuals [that are] typically inaccurate. Stereotypes oversimplify and exaggerate attributions made to groups creating distinctions between categories which are greater than actual observed differences. (Dysart, 10)

According to Rebecca J. Cook and Simone Cusack:

Stereotypes are invoked for complex varied and sometimes, contradictory reasons. We stereotype to define a category of people. We create categories to maximise ease of understanding and predictability. (Cook, 9)

Bem and Lenney argue:

"This avoidance could emerge either because sex typed individuals are motivated to maintain a self-image as masculine or feminine or because they are motivated to present a public image of masculinity or femininity to those around them". (50)

Men and women both have to face micro aggression as the end product of getting deviated from traditional gender roles and breaking gender stereotypes.

Some of the mother-daughter relationships among the characters of the novel is studied in detail. According to Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang and Linda Rennie Forcey, mothering can be defined as "historically and culturally variable relationship in which one person nurtures and cares for another". (256) Consciously or unconsciously womanhood is strongly associated with motherhood. Unsurprisingly, women who reject motherhood are bethought as both infantile and un-feminine. Motherhood is much less recognised as the product of stringent institutional control, pronatalist policy and ideological presumptions about gender, body, and sexuality. Consequently, voluntarily childless women are often characterised as immature and selfish. They also experience great difficulty in being accepted as adults. We cannot ignore the facts that in which conditions women become mothers. Motherhood generally is the after effect or one of the consequences of marriage which happens to majority women, willingly or unwillingly. Womanhood is strongly associated with motherhood. In such scenario, those who reject motherhood cannot be stated to be infantile and unfeminine. There are various reasons to take such decisions. Motherhood in modern notion is perceived as social role for women rather just being a sexual reproductive role. In our contemporary families and among spouse, we see voluntary childless women. We must make this acceptable and normalise the fact that it is their wish and decision to become a mother. If any woman is not having a child, it cannot be made a factor to bully, marginalise, or subjugate her and consider her to be less than a woman. Becoming a mother is a huge responsibility and not just an act of giving birth to a child after conceiving and carrying it for nine months in her womb. Women need to feel free of symbolic configuration of woman as mother. Often it is considered that women, especially educated and from middle class prefer their career and raising their class status over bearing a child and hence, they are childless. It can be the reason for some of the women but we cannot generalise this concept for every such woman of our society to later make it a stereotype.

'Psychopathological disturbance' is nothing but the resultant of one's own childhood trauma, poor parental role models, oppressive child rearing, too much sibling childcare responsibility or negative identification with their mothers. Since 1970s there has been substantial hike in the total rates of

childlessness. Women who are child free do not mean that they substitute parenthood with career and their commitment. It is stereotype because making any decision is their choice which can also be taken out of financial concern, their perception of inhospitable world, concern regarding over population, social problems which tends to be like overburden or compromise, etc. Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler are well-known academics and critics of the last twentieth century to contribute and express themselves on feminism and gender issues. Their texts are based on the study of Psychoanalytical Theory, Western Philosophy and Objectivity of Scientific Research, which draws the inference that femininity is not bound to maternity. Childless women cannot be presumed to lack some essential feminine essence which is supposed to be there, in any woman.

Tilottama (Tilo) in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* refuses to be a biological mother. She aborts her foetus as soon as she learns that she is pregnant.

...she worried that the little human she produced would have to negotiate the same ocean full of strange and dangerous fish that she had had to in her relationship with her mother. She did not trust that she would be a better parent than Maryam Ipe. (391)

Tilottama decides not to give birth to any child ever. Her decision gives her the feel of being independent and the sense of owning her own body. Her own worldly experience and her relationship with her mother along with her subjective perception influence her future choices and decisions in life. Tilo did not want her child to face all the atrocities that she faced in this crooked world.

Maryam Ipe was a lady of immense courage and love. She was abided by the social institutions of the society. Being a feminist, she was not at the receiving ends of it. Tilo was her biological child but to the world she was addressed as her adopted daughter. Although she was a feminist and had chosen an independent life, but because she lived all her life in her hometown she did not dare to declare that Tilo was actually her biological daughter. She prefers to present herself as a reformer rather than a revolutionary. Publicly, she could not claim her to be her own biological born daughter as she had eschewed marriage. Hence, the distance that she created from Tilo was just to get the acceptance of the society. Her decisions aimed at maintaining good moral code of conduct that could be passed on to her daughter to live with integrity. Ms. Ipe did not abandon her and never tried to be selfish but claimed and owned her to love and raise her into an independent lady. Tilo thinks about herself that she would never be a nice mother as good as her mother had been to her. Therefore, she aborts the foetus after knowing about her two months pregnancy. Later she also convinces Naga, her husband not to expect any child from her. Tilo does not care for anything and anybody. She appears to be against all social institutions of the society like family and marriage and shows less care and effort in her relationships may be due to the treatment she received from the society that added bitterness in her behaviour. But after her mother's death she seems to replicate the deeds of her mother by adopting Miss Jabeen the Second and starts feeling protective towards her like a mother could, unconsciously doing the same what her mother did as an act of mother to adopt and protect her.

Tilottama goes for abortion and decides never to be a mother but after her mother's death she picks Udaya (Miss Jabeen the Second), from roadside. She tries to be her foster mother in the same way as she thought of Maryam Ipe. Whole of her life she remained distant from her and had tried to express her anger and resentment, but she does feel too lonely after her heavenly abode. Similarly in the first novel of Roy, Rahel gets divorced like her mother, Ammu. She could have prevented this by not being indifferent to her husband but due to her disturbed psyche she later on walks into incest with her own brother. She surpasses her mother in breaking the love laws laid by the society - who should love whom, when and how much. Likewise, Anjum finds a little girl and adopts her to shower all her motherly love and affection on her after separating from her mother (Jahanara Begum) to resonate like her.

Freud becomes vocal about the intensity of the pre-Oedipal attachment of a little girl to her mother. In 1975 Mahler remarked that girls have a unique developmental difficulty as they have to first identify from the same mother in order to solve the rapprochement conflict and gain individualisation. Freud thought that the earliest attachment of the girl to her mother is destined to perish because it is so intense. Apparently, the more intense, the more difficult it is for each member of the pair to separate. Management of the rapprochement crisis is the mother's responsibility, and the outcome depends to an extent, on maternal ability to negotiate detachment from the consuming closeness without destroying an irreplaceable identification. A daughter feels an unbreakable bond between herself and her mother because of the sexual identity and personal identity. The present phase of life of mother will be the future of a little girl as the same is fed and imprinted in her mind, since childhood or even earlier from the stage she attains consciousness. This is what happens with Tilo and Rahel. Thus, care and nurturing become so basic to the

female psyche that any conscious or unconscious disruption of these tracts leads to psychological and behavioural problems which is well reflected in the other major characters of Roy.

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* Arundhati Roy shows the impact of mother's love and care that is built in relationship with her transgender child, Aftab who later calls itself as Anjum. This Muslim couple too waited eagerly for the birth of a son. After six years of marriage and three daughters, the couple was happy with the birth of Aftab who was considered to be a boy. But later it was revealed by the doctor that he was not a boy child. "After examining Aftab he said he was not, medically speaking a Hijra- a female trapped in a male body..." (*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 16) He was a rare example of a hermaphrodite which means to have both male and female characteristics. "Aftab became Anjum, disciple of Ustad Kulsoom Bi of the Delhi Gharana, one of the seven regional Hijra Gharanas in the country." (*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 25) His gender did not lessen the love, care and affection for her child (Aftab) in Jahanara Begum. Even after Aftab moved to Khwabgah leaving the father's house, the motherly concern for it never faded away like that of the father. For years she kept on sending hot meals to Khwabgah every day and they could meet each other only at the dargah of the Hazrat Sarmad Shaheed. The gender of the child does not lessen the motherly love, care and affection for her. Jahanara Begum was all too much on her guard to hide the fact of her child's gender just to protect him from facing gender discrimination in the society. She was not ashamed or disheartened to know that he was not a boy child. She feared the ill-treatment, humiliation and mental trauma that her little child would have to face from the society while growing up.

In Urdu, the only language she knew, all things, not just living things but all things- carpets, clothes, books, pens, musical instruments- had a gender. Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman. Everything except her baby.

(*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 8)

Aftab became Anjum by her own choice and will. Anjum's mother was never careless, ignorant or harsh towards her. The motherly love was always there for her irrespective of her gender. Even after the birth of a son after Aftab, she was still her most looked after and groomed child that needed to be protected from all the odds of the society. This love and care helped to change Aftab to Anjum with a decent personality who was filled with love, affection and positive attitude towards life. Thus, she was an exception for the media to write and show her life-story without being the recipient of stereotype treatment for being transgender. She was never ill-treated by her parents and was always encouraged by them to get music classes and proper school education. She was not thrown out of her parents' custody instead it was her choice to leave her parents and move to Khwabgah. Later Anjum found and adopted a lost girl as her daughter (Zainab) to transfer all that motherly love, care and affection she had been installed within her by her biological mother, Jahanara begum. Thus, what one receives in one's childhood from one's parents and other relationships later on gets reflected in one's personality. Zainab was not a lost child but an abandoned one may be because she was a girl and not a boy. Zainab became Anjum's only love for her life before being the victim of the riot. Motherhood does not get defined by giving birth to a baby, but it equally involves the efforts in the rearing and upbringing of the child as a good personality in the society. Anjum was neither a biological mother nor father to any child but by adopting a girl she proves her motherhood quality. Thus, gender alone does not define motherhood. Transgenders too can become mother and father to their adopted children, to love and care for them, to make them better persons for the society and for themselves. Zainab stands as an example to this. Often there is a stereotype belief that transgender are discarded members from their own family who do not receive their parents' love and affection. Aftab is exception to this to prove that it happens but not with all transgenders. Media for its own reasons keep projecting them to be all times sufferers. Other genders (men and women) too are responsible for their sufferings and success in life by their code of conduct towards them. "Motherhood is beyond gender; it is more of a behaviour," (HindustanTimes 2018) said Sawant (first transgender mother in India) who spoke at a talk show *Gauri Sawant: The Extra Ordinary Story of The First Transgender Mother*, organised by an NGO Creating Possibilities, at Elysium Banquets, Dhule road.

Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, are the characters from Roy's first novel, *The God of Small Things*, who fail to understand and sympathise with Ammu and her twins. They are least hospitable towards them. Mammachi as a mother and grandmother is not able to care and make decisions about goodwill of her daughter and grand-daughter. Baby Kochamma, is a woman but lacks the sensitivity of a woman as she is too harsh with Ammu's twins, Rahel and Estha. She often abuses and scolds them out

for her pleasure and also out of hatred towards them. A child is influenced deeply by the behaviour of not only parents but other family members and society too. Thus, as cited by William Leach in his work, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* published in 1980, is relatable in the above context to be quoted below:

Woman's suffrage is not primarily a political, but a social question wrote Jesse Jones, a Boston Unitarian minister, in *The Woman's Journal*, and means a profounder revolution in the whole structure of society than many advocates seem ever to have dreamed of. (15)

We cannot deny that the maternal body is located between nature and culture. Paternal law is secondary to maternal functions in its existence. Julia Kristeva argues about separation of maternal body and woman. A woman can experience maternal function and can be a mother through adoption (example is Anjum who adopted Zainab and Maryam Ipe, who adopted Tilo), caretaking (like Tilottama felt for Miss Jabeen the Second) or sublimation. Kristeva voices the contemporary problem of motherhood in the coexisting society through her idea of rejection. Women are reduced to their maternal functions in the wake of their own subjective abjection of maternal desire due to their rejection or experience of separation from their own mother. This argument finds its practical approach in the characters of Tilottama, Rahel and Anjum. All these characters end up replicating their mother's role and image that they had been carrying with them all those days in becoming adult.

The general perception of people across the globe is that no one can replace a mother. They act as pillars for emotional support. They sacrifice for their children and help them to heal from any kind of trauma. They guide their children to attain functional adulthood. Mothers not only support and make their children progressive but they also act as backbone for the entire family to provide and foster all emotional and material needs. Mothers are the role models for their daughters, from early age when their training starts to shape them from a girl to a woman. Thus, we can say that mothers are responsible for the women their daughters become out of a girl after years of moulding along with other factors. Anjum despite being a transgender proves to be good caring mother. And lack of this motherly figure/character develops a great void in children's psyche, like Rahel and Prema. We need to understand here that to be caring, protective, loving, pampering, and nurturing a child, is not always a mothers' duty alone. These things can be fulfilled by men too. We have developed a stereotype character of all women to be perfect mothers. If they fail to be a good mother or a sympathetic and generous human being, we need to counsel them and focus on their life events and upbringing instead of judging them and declaring such characters or people to be less man or woman. Fathers' role too is not limited in just providing bread to the family and made stereotype for fulfilling the financial needs of the children while they are growing up.

The father-daughter relationship that Manjushree Thapa narrates in her novel, *Seasons of Flight* of Gokul as father of his daughters, Prema and Bijaya can be studied here to understand the role of motherhood and its substitution. Many mothering functions shifted to Prema's father in the absence (due to death) of her mother. Her early development was compromised. Her father was free of patriarchal ideology and very liberal, modern, modest and optimistic. After his wife's death instead of getting married again, he chooses to be a single father/parent, raising his daughters without any gender discrimination. He moves like a phantom full of dreams and well wishes for happy and better life of his both daughters. Prema's father prepared the morning meal even on last day when she was leaving home for her further education. "I have had to be both father and mother to you, Chhori." (238) She telephoned him every month and could transfer part of her salary into Gokul's bank account when she got the job in Nepal. "You are as good as a son to me." (21) Prema seems to carry dual role of gender (son and daughter) for her father. No doubt that due to her father's encouragement and support she was not less than any son or we can say that she was not the embodiment of fragile, dependent stereotype woman. Her father too was not ashamed or considered inferior to play the role of mother in rearing them and giving a better life to her daughters and that does not make him less of any man or masculinity. Hence motherhood can be substituted by fatherhood but in case of Prema she has the void due to her dead mother and the stereotype of the society of having a mother and her importance. Unconsciously she is not able to substitute the role of her father and mother in her life due to the less understood and discussed prevailing stereotypes of man and woman's roles and relationships.

Mulaqat Ali in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* could not bear the truth about the real identity of Aftab to be Anjum as he considers it a misfortune to befall on his forefathers' lineage i.e. Changez Khan's dynasty. He stopped talking to him. "Aftab became Anjum, disciple of Ustad Kulsoom Bi of the Delhi Gharana, one of the seven regional Hijra Gharanas in the country". (*The Ministry of Utmost*

Happiness, 25) He represents stereotype masculinity that is too much traditional, cultural, and patriarchal. He never talks to her after she left his house and changed her name from Aftab to Anjum. Gender of his child becomes the prestige issue for him, but for his wife Aftab/Anjum is just a name of her child irrespective of the gender. But we cannot stereotype from his family that gender matters to only father and not mother. We have the vice-versa cases too in our society.

Jacob George comments about gender discrimination that he encounters in Roy's novel about the irrationalities and injustices of domestic and social life:

She attacks the double standard that one sex is to be sheltered and judged and kept from power-while the other, regardless of its behaviour, runs the world. Arundhati Roy's assaults, on the lopsided values of a male dominated society, are characterised by their humour seasoned with irony and sarcasm which tend to avoid extremities of aggression and hostility. (72)

Motherhood is a term which is gender specific version of another term called parenthood. It can be substituted, at times with the role of fatherhood also. Motherhood is a larger term connecting three categories of inquiry that is motherhood as institution, motherhood as identity or subjectivity and motherhood as experience. Through the characters of the novel we have explored the dynamic multiple articulations of mother, mothering and motherhood. The characters and incidents are evidence that how the perception of motherhood is changing in our society and people are breaking the stereotype. Motherhood is a stereotype role for woman which often paves the way for the women to be the subject of gender discrimination. Mothering as an activity can be performed by any adult human being regardless of biological or gendered constructions. The maternal functions and giving birth to a baby often establishes the binaries of feminine/masculine oppositions. This is how, the contemporary author Arundhati Roy has started dismantling the norms and challenges pre-existing in the society for decades. It's time to talk out of the box to lessen the gender discrimination and making motherhood gender free performance for the people who want to be a parent and at the same time making women guilt free for not being a mother if they don't want to be by their own choice and due reason.

Reference

- Bem, S. L., & Lenney, E. "Sex Typing and the Avoidance of Cross-Sex Behavior", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. no.33, Issue.1. 1976 pp.48-54. <https://doi.ORG/10.1037/h0078640>
- Cook, Rebecca J. and Cusack Simone. *Gender Stereotyping: Transnational Legal Perspectives*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- Dysart, Dawn Castagno. "Gender Roles and Stereotypes Revealed in Recent Best-Selling Adolescent Literature: A Content Analysis". University of Missouri. PhD Thesis. December 2016.
<https://paperzz.com/doc/8037529/gender-roles-and-stereotypes-revealed-in-recent>
- George, Jacob C. "The God of Small Things: Humour as a Mode of Feminist Protest", *Arundhati Roy: The Novelist Extraordinary*, Ed. R.K. Dhawan. pp. 71-76. 1999.
- Glenn, E. N., Chang, G & Forcey, L.N. (Eds.). *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*. California: Routledge.1994
- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Penguin Books. 1997.
- . *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Haryana: Penguin Books. 2017.
- Singh, Jyoti. *Indian Women Novelists*. Jaipur: Rawat pub., 2007
- Thapa, Manjushree. *Seasons of Flight*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012
- 2018 May 14. "Motherhood is beyond gender, says Pune's first transgender mother Gauri Sawant". *Hindustan Times*
<https://www.hindustantimes.com/pune-news/motherhood-is-beyond-gender-says-pune-s-first-transgender-mother-gauri-sawant/story-26uEhEvEqqXmXKuwcVfu1I.html>