

Wrong Identities Trapped in a Wrong World: Critiquing the Process of Othering and disabling in Arundhati Roy's the Ministry of Utmost Happiness

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally marginalized groups and people with disabilities are excluded from mainstream cultural norms because these suppressed voices lack power, resources, and privilege. The image of a different or wrong body interrupts the social order, much like gays, lesbians, women, and blacks. The novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) talks about the most oppressed groups in society whose abilities are ignored and perceived as inferior because of their difference. Society fails to accommodate people with differences, i.e., cultural, political, gender, ideological, and geo-political. To cover up the limitations in society, it constructs the idea of disability. The extensive analysis of this novel will show how the capitalist society makes others in the name of difference. Society excludes, does injustice, and maintains a disabling process of making the other. Arundhati Roy voices the decentering role of these marginalized characters and shows how they fight back against the socially disabling process and normative gaze. The dis/abled other challenges the notions of being and belonging.

Keywords: Social Disability, othering, disabling environment, transgender, normative gaze.

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is the exceptional fictional work of Arundhati Roy that spans decades and locations but predominantly takes place in Delhi and Kashmir. Being published in the year 2017, the novel “seems to embrace the whole of India, from its Dravidian southern tip to its Northern reaches in Kashmir, which was then still (in theory if not in fact) the autonomous state of Jammu and Kashmir.” (Pessoa-Miquel, 2021, p.1) Thus the narrative turns out to be a document of a relatively contemporary India and the enigma of its misfits. Roy meticulously chooses some shattered individuals to tell the story of a somewhat shattered system immersing in the unheard and unnoticed voices of the “unconsoled” and “ugrievables” (Ma, 2022, p. 55). To unmask the abnormality of the system that presses the marginalized “to the point of brutalization” (Goh, 2021, 5), Roy questions the idea of normalcy by placing the apparent ab/normal ones of our society as the central figures of her fictional discourse. The body and identity become a signifier and a tool of exclusion, oppression, exploitation, colonization, marginalization, and othering, leaving many people dis/abled/, dis/functional so that a profit-monger capitalist system can rampage on smoothly. It is impossible to determine the abled body's absolute and essential category. Formerly, the medical definition of disability as a mental and physical impairment was one popular way to identify someone as abled or disabled. However, several theorists and critics have questioned and revisited the approach in recent decades, introducing new parameters for defining and making the disability. In Roy's *Ministry*, Anjum, Saddam, Tilo, Musa, and all other marginalized characters can be viewed as disabled. For example, transgender Anjum's disability lies in her being born in a so-called wrong body, Saddam's being born in a wrong caste, Musa's being born in a wrong land, and Tilo's being born in a seemingly inappropriate relationship. All the

Jannat Guest House members' and visitors' dejection of the stereotypical notion of normalcy and the abled body can be seen as a mode of resistance. The narrative's inspiring personas and their transformations question the traditionally constructed ableist culture and deconstruct the idea of normalcy that threatens the existential ideals based on bodily identity.

Anjum, Saddam, Tilo, and Musa subvert the absolute and essential category of the unitary concept of subjectivity. Jannat Guest House dismantles the stereotypical hostile identity society promotes and practices. Anjum, Saddam, Tilo, and Musa have also gone through the same journey of disabling process and resistance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several critics have drawn attention to the relevant issues of postcolonial corrupted Indian politics, Gender Identity, postcolonial and postmodern narratives, and psychoanalysis of the socially, religiously, geographically, culturally, and physically traumatized and alienated people. Ana and Lisa (2019) focus on Roy's representation of precarity. They showed that the recurrently Othered in India is pushing back the boundaries of their limitations. This study connects the concept of other/othering as the first step in the disabling process. This process is not directly connected with physical impairment but with the socio-cultural disability practices often in liaison with the social model. The socio-cultural model is crucial in societal relations, norms, values, and structures. This new academic field has introduced and strengthened the social science approach to disability. Tom Shakespeare (1994) focused on cultural representations of disabled people and suggested: "that disabled people were 'objectified' by cultural representations." (p. 287) In the following years, prominent scholars in the Anglo-Saxon world, such as Lennard J. Davis, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Robert McRuer, David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, Margrit Shildrick, Tobin Siebers, Shelley Tremain, and others published a wide variety of cultural and literary analyses showing the value and productivity of treating "disability as a cultural trope." (Garland-Thomson 2) In 2005, Devlieger focused on communication and cultural diversity to study intersections between migration, ethnicity, race, and disability. (As cited in Waldschmidt, 2018, p. 69) In 2006, Snyder and Mitchell explicitly introduced a cultural model of disability.

The elaborative approach to *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is an excellent ingenuity to understand the cultural model of disability. As "Disability studies claim that disability is not just a health problem or a developmental disorder to be resolved or managed, but a difference constructed" (Waldschmidt, 2018, p.69), this paper emphasizes the depravity of people with differences who do not belong to any category of the society. As Hossain (2010) claims, "Society has little – should we say, nil – to offer to them."(p. 10) They are cornered or invisible in society the way disabled people are struggling for their visibility. The ab/normal or othered/marginalized characters of this novel rename disability as a site of resistance and a source of cultural agency previously suppressed.

The novel exemplifies how resolutely the othered/marginalized/ab/normals want to be insubordinate against discrimination for their skin color, sexual orientation, and gender indeterminacy. Most of the research papers talked about the physical and psychological sufferings, deprivation, and grotesque conditions of life of people with differences/misfits. This analysis focuses on the normative gaze of society that forcefully puts someone with a difference in a disabling process.

The socio-cultural model of disability might be comparatively a new discourse, but its traces can also be found in history. There are various implications of the word disabled even before it became a theory. In a Dictionary of the English Language, Samuel Johnson (1773) defines the term disable as follows: "1. To deprive of natural force; 2. To impair; to diminish; 3. To make inactive; 4. To deprive of usefulness or efficacy; 5. To exclude as wanting proper qualification." (Edwards, 1993, p. 372) There are also historical traces of how society used to disable people from the perspective of inheritance or benefit due to their

ability, nationality, and gender. In this novel, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, the people in question are disabled because their behavior or identity is against the law, which possibly has no direct association with their physical or mental impairment. Turner (2012), while identifying the practice of disabling process in the eighteenth century, has mentioned, “if a person was excluded from a particular group due to his loss of qualification to be considered as a member of that group, he could be regarded as disabled in the eighteenth century.” (as cited in Chueh, 2021, p. 6) also has shown several examples/ situations where people are disabled because their “behavior or identity is against the law.” (p. 6) This is a situation which possibly has no direct association with their physical or mental impairment; it is a socio-cultural process and practice.

The recent discourse on disability is not limited to its medical definition and approach. Critics and activists like Harlan Hahn (1985) have taken the issue of disability on the grounds of economic and socio-political context and tried to examine the problems and rights of disabled people. He addressed the issue of a disabling environment as a byproduct of “a structured social environment” that fails to accommodate the needs and desires of disabled citizens rather than “the inability of a disabled individual to adapt to the demands of society.” (p. 12) There are systemic barriers, negative attitudes, and social exclusion, purposely or inadvertently. The disabling process includes the process of exclusion by labeling people as dis/abled and marginalized, denied fundamental rights, and forced not to be involved in the mainstream economic system of production and value-making.

Roy’s novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* has a spectrum of characters. Most of them belong to the margin of society for their birth abnormality, confusing gender identity (hijra), being born in a Dalit subaltern class, being a nonconformist woman, or simply belonging to a religiously minor group or geopolitically disadvantageous/ vulnerable locale. Anjum, Tilo, Saddam, and Musa’s behavior and identity are not functional for the norms of society. The norms and laws of society make them dis/able. Nevertheless, the rejection of abjection and victimhood and Roy’s overt celebration of these misfits try to subvert the interiorizing of the other, decreasing the disabling process. These characters fail to meet the conventional expectations as a physically challenged person does.

The insight into Roy’s narration of every individual shows that they are equally competent enough to lead a happy life only if the existing constructed structure of socio-politics, identities, and religious identity are omitted and ignored. By selecting a non-existent lifestyle, these characters of Roy’s Novel unmask the hypocrisy and disability of the existing set of various socio-political-economical systems without which modern life appears unimaginable to the people of capitalists and privileged sections of society.

MINISTRY’S MISFITS IN THE DIS/ABLING PROCESS

Dimensions of disability are not limited to physical impairment but rather any inferior binaries, including religion, sex, race, ethnicity, social and economic status (class), and skin tone. It is a broad conceptual framework that maintains and manipulates some prejudices against the inferiors. The politics of inclusion and exclusion maintain the power structure of society. The norms of the megalomaniac society are sustained on the binaries of superior and inferior. The wheel of the dystopian community functions by creating and manipulating others which this study claims is a crucial tool for disabling processes. “Much like gender implying the binary opposite of “male” and “female,” or like “race” as founded on the parting of “whites” and “blacks,” disability is intersectional and only thinkable concerning an “other.” (Waldschmidt, 2018, p. 74) The analysis of the misfits in Roy’s *Ministry* equates the disabling process with the critical and cultural disability studies and “this model questions the commonly unchallenged ‘normality,’ and investigates how practices of (de-) normalization result in the social category we have come to call disability” (Waldschmidt, 2018, p. 4). Disability is not a given entity but rather a process of hegemonic practices of society.

Roy deals with the margin and center of society and culture in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Anjum,

Musa, Saddam, Tilo, Tilo's Mother, Azad, and Blind Imam go through the interplay between Normality and disability. Their identities got new forms of subjectivity designed, created, and shaped by different institutions of society. Pratt says it is exciting to bring disability and culture together to analyze social spaces. It is a space where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other in power relations [...]. (34) The deliberately silenced, alienated, excluded population from the mainstream enters into a disabling process with the Duniya (world) concept in *The Ministry of Utmost of Happiness*. This Duniya only accommodates the identities that confirm the norms. This Duniya (world) has no place for the excluded persons belonging to the periphery. Belongingness includes (be) longing as Anjum for the notions of (in) dependence crumbles from Shahjanabad, Old Delhi, to Khawabgah-The House of Dreams. The fleshly and spiritual feelings of homelessness bring Anjum back to the harsh Duniya. Anjum witnesses that even Jantar Mantar has no place for Anjum that uplifts and protects the people of the periphery. Mr. Aggarwal arrogantly questioned, "Who gave these Hijras permission to sit here? Which of these Struggles do they belong to?" (Roy, 2017, p. 119) So, Anjum does not belong to the innumerable people assembled at Jantar Mantar to raise their voices against injustice and corruption.

In the power play of the binary world where one must be a man or a woman, good or bad, beautiful or ugly, the transgender person has no role. In the disabling process of Society, they are excluded and sometimes struggle with their visibility (presence) and existence (absence) in society. The life of Anjum and the truth behind Anjum's miseries is that she is less than others, abominable and ab/normal. She was a long-cherished boy after three girls. "Her parents were waiting for their Aftab for six years." (p. 1) However, Anjum's mother terrifyingly discovers that the baby will not fit into society's normalcy. She thought about killing herself and the baby to eliminate the shame and the stone of ridicule by the people. A young, innocent boy, Aftab was ignorant about the difference. The physical imbalance excluded him from all circles and the world around him. Because "The very utterance of hijra propagates an inevitable sense of abomination and deprecation: they are impotent; they are sexual deviants; they are nasty; they are abject!" (Hossain, 2010, p. 125)

Anjum is trapped in a body of the opposite sex, a somatic condition known as gender dysphoria. The truth behind Anjum's miseries is the social unacceptance of his body as normal. Hakim Mulakat Ali, Aftab's father, tries desperately to turn his child into a normal one which is an abnormal dis/abling process against nature. He decides the gender identity and performance of Aftab by castrating his girl's part, whereas Aftab's desires are pretty much feminine. He was a woman trapped in a male's body that Mulakat Ali ignored. In normalizing Aftab's duality in body, child Aftab's desires remained inexplicable, forcing him to take self-inflicted and communal isolation. His homelessness creates his new space of belonging, named Khawabgah.

The castrated Anjum goes through three surgeries and enters the continuous process of becoming as Butler sees woman: a term in process, a becoming (Butler, 1990). Anjum/Aftab is going through what Bhabha (1994) calls 'liminality' for not fitting into any sex/gender binary opposites the heterosexist society approves of or conceives as 'normal.' (Hossain 121) After two corrective surgeries, Anjum's voice sounded like "two voices quarreling with each other instead of one." (Roy, 2017, p. 29). The process of abnormalizing/othering starts with his/her birth. The way the mother keeps the secret and the heterosexist attempt of Anjum's father of Anjum to transform him from hijra to 'normal' are the dominant steps of ab/normalization. He was tortured to perform as per the gender-specific role. Moreover, Aftab becomes a fragmented body and self-torn between her/his anatomical body, gender identity, and gender performance.

The pangs of a transgender body-soul duality internalize all the unhappy outside events. Thus, the pain of Aftab- Anjum transformation no longer remains a personal enigma as it now connects all the meta-narratives, the geo-political bodies, its uproars history of pain and suffering, and struggles. It seems like Roy wants to narrow down all these to Anjum/Aftab's body. The depiction of Aftab/Anjum's wolfish howling

like crying out of shame, her hitting/herself badly between the legs, her painful castration and two following corrective surgeries, and finally taking hormones to un-deepen her voice resonates/ echoes the thousands of voices of ab/normal people out there in India.

The dis/abled other/s are being noticed but ignored for their humanity. Despite the diverse socio-political and economic locations, Saddam Hussein became potentially fragmented by class and sub-caste location. The hierarchy of society discriminates against and inequities Dalits. The ChamarSuddam Hussain goes through a series of disabling process that makes him partially disabled. The hardworking Saddam was a bricklayer and then a security guard at a museum under the supervision of the Safe and Sound Company. He was responsible for guarding the signature Artwork of stainless steel, which reflected the sun's rays that discomforted his eyes. The ego-centric capitalist rejected the permission to use sunglasses to protect his eyes from the rays. In a master-slave relationship, the master will set the norms for the slave. A sunglass violates the watchman image society restricts. This restriction gradually made Saddam a misfit for the job of a watchman. His eyes were signed and could not be opened in daylight. He got fired. Saddam went through a silent process of disabling only to fit in the constructed image of a watchman. The outcome of this process makes him permanently disabled for several jobs. His social class, lack of voice, and marginal identity made him suffer. Like Anjum, Saddam Hussein also goes through the turmoil of belongingness. The transformation of Aftab to Anjum echoes the turmoil of a Hindu boy Dayachand to become a Muslim Saddam Hossain. The changing of his identity mirrors the destructed cultural harmony of the social framework. The exploitation of the canonical society and the brutal killing of his father by an enraged mob of cow vigilantes (gaurakshaks) for a false acquisition victimize him as dis/able to fit in the place or identity of this narrow society. Saddam discerns how "Everybody watched. Nobody stopped them" (Roy, 2017, p. 89). Roy brings the execution of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hossain. Thrilled, this shattered, the destitute boy changed his identity from Dayachand to Saddam Hussain. His existential crisis lays bare the vulnerability of our system, where there is little capacity to accommodate differences or diversity.

Tilo is an abled-bodied person without any visible physical or mental disability. Her queer birth history led her to a carefree life. She was born out of wedlock to an untouchable pariah father and a Syrian Christian mother who remained unmarried the rest of her life. Her mother adopted her and initially abandoned her for social norms. However, Tilo is not bound by social institutions like marriage and family. She let herself free from the shackles of social norms. She fashions worn-out clothes and smokes beds. As Biplob's one of the tenants repeatedly mentions, "she is not a normal person" (p. 149). Biplob also sketches the early life of Tilo as unconventional, carefree, and a young woman living alone. Tilo, an architecture school student without history, becomes a dislocated person. She is odd as she breaks the social norms by coming late at night or early in the morning. "She has no schedule" (p. 131).

The ambiguity of Anjum, Saddam, and Tilo foregrounds the normative account of what constitutes a sense of place and what constitutes a threat to place. By displacing and disembodimenting the ab/normal, society and modern culture alienate them from the affective, intersubjective, and pragmatic relations to the world. Tilo is an elusive entity; she needs a social place, an identity within a family, and a geographic location. But with Tilo, "nobody seemed to be able to place her." (Roy, 2017, p. 154). Anjum and Tilo occupy spaces of an unconventional and non-conforming nature.

Tilo's life is intertwined with three men, Biplob, Naga, and Musa. Her marital relationship with Naga could not restore Tilo to normalcy; instead, the upper caste-class family of Naga only contrasted and accentuated her difference. As Biplob describes the wedding of Naga and Tilo, he captures the reaction of Naga's mother, a royalty, -"She was trying to put a brave face on the trauma that her new daughter-in-law's shocking complexion had visited upon her" (p. 185). During her stay in Kashmir, she was captured and tortured by Amrik Sing and ACP Pinky. They killed Gul-kak, Musa's friend, a village fool, and then in custody, ACP pinky shaved Tilo's hair off. These events traumatize her for the rest of her life. Tilo shifts

from not becoming a biological mother to embracing an abandoned child -Miss Jabeen. The second is another testimony of Tilo's nonconformist life choices shaped by her queer childhood and the traumas she experienced in her adulthood in Kashmir.

Another example of a disabling process can be traced to the life of Musa, a Kashmiri resistant who formerly lost his beloved wife and daughter. The traumatic experience takes away the normalcy of his life. He starts a perfectly functioning family life, but killing his wife and daughter by the Kashmiri armed forces transforms him into a militant from an artist. The troubled geo-political situation made his family life dysfunctional, as he mentions-“In our Kashmir, the dead will live forever; and the living is only dead people, pretending” (p. 343). He loses his ability to lead the social life of an ordinary citizen. He even loses his identity for his undercover as a Kashmiri resistant. Musa's characterization is parallel to Saddam Hussein's. Like Saddam, he takes a new name, Commander Gulrez, and Roy creates a mystery centered around the name by confusing the readers and the other characters in the novel about whether Musa is dead or alive. His frequent absence from and presence in the narrative symbolizes his mysterious undercover life.

The disabling process creates the craving to be expected, to be average but ultimately make a nonentity. The unfulfilled desires of Roy's misfits create anxiety about their place in society. The place in society becomes a fantasy. Tilo's mother, Maryam Ipe, is another example who dies of inflammation of the brain leading to psychosis – “which doctors said particularly affected powerful, self-willed people who suddenly found themselves helpless and at the mercy of those they had once treated minions” (p. 241). Maryam Ipe, the English teacher, brought revolutionary changes in teaching methods. She was pierced with grim questions. She was entombed in the net of social norms. She treasured an untouchable man, and the fruit of the love led her to many challenges in this patriarchal society. The anxiety of single motherhood, social harassment, fears, and belittling norms mark her as ab/normal. She adopted her child for protection. The doctor mentioned her as a remarkable woman who develops psychosis and utters meaningless ugly words. The doctor reveals the reason for this meaningless utterance of her illness. It is all about her suffering. “Our conditioning, our prejudices, our history” (Roy, 2017, p. 253). Anjum, Saddam, Tilo, and Maryam all faced explicit, implicit, visceral, and systemic or institutional discrimination in the disabling process.

BLINDNESS AND PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT

Blindness is the key motif of the novel. In Anjum's sanctuary of battered people, Imam Zainudin and Saddam deal with blindness; one is completely blind, and the other is partially blind. The Vopal Gass leak incident, mentioned quite a few times in the narrative, leaves many people permanently blind. Dr. Azad has one crushed arm and a fractured leg symbolizing how the citizens of free India are disabled in numerous ways. To resist public unrest in Kashmir, the paramilitary used pellet guns to that blind people agitated. In Biplob's words- “The world is inured to the sight of pied-up corpses but not to the sight of hundreds of living people who have been blinded..... Boys who've lost one eye are back on the street, prepared to risk the other”(Roy, 2017, p. 430) The repetitive reference to blindness mocks how the entire system transformed the normals into a passive audience.

FIGHTING AGAINST THE NORMATIVE GAZES AN ENFORCE DISABLING ENVIRONMENT

The normative gaze is an active agent of the cultural model of disability. The beauty ideas, objectification of the body, and white supremacy promote the ideology of the normative gaze. The ideals of the normative gaze create the symmetry that eventually becomes the ideal of becoming normal. Anjum faced harsh criticisms, insults, and physical hurt by the people who called her a clown without a circus, a queen without a palace and called him a he-she. The unusual stares and gazes of people created a disabling environment for Anjum. Particular beauty standards and gender performance forced Anjum to follow Bombay silk to

eliminate body shaming. Tilo faced the normative gaze for her black skin that dislocated her from the constructed beauty standard. Tilo resists all these artificial norms by avoiding traditional makeup during her marriage. She stood against the weird stare, and the baffling gaze of the populaces made her other.

The socially constructed dis/abled others of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* liberate themselves from the heteronormative society and go beyond normative limits and oppression. They construct their community outside the heteronormative society. The Jannat Guest House accommodates both the living and the dead and blurs the boundaries of social discrimination. In creating Jannat Guest House and Funeral Services, Anjum has created a space that catches those who fall off the grid for whom family, society, religion, caste, and class no longer hold any meaning. They do not belong. Saddam, an outcast, got relief from the grief of his father's death at this fabricated Jannat. All odds of the society got their world here as a baby picked up from trash, an animal lover, a music teacher, a molvi, and Tilo.

Saddam, in collaboration with Anjum, launched the Jannat Funeral Services. However, as the narrator remarks, "The one clear criterion was that Jannat Funeral Services would only bury those whom the graveyards and imams of the Duniya had rejected." (Roy, 2017, p. 80). Anjum knows that this self-made home is the place of falling people who have no existence in society. "Arre, even we aren't real. We don't exist." (p. 84).

Anjum preferred to address Saddam as a "Chamar and not Dalit" (p. 85) because she did not find anything disrespectful in using this word. She called herself Hijra with equal pride as she called him a Chamar. Moreover, Saddam takes an altered identity, and Anjum embraces her authentic self, the duality she is born with within.

The blind Imam Zia has the insight that society does not have. This blind Imam performs a very significant function that society should do. Though Zia is a Muslim, he provides funerals for the dead irrespective of caste, creed, and religion.

Dr. Azad Vartya is another deprived, rebellious character fasting to protest against the Capitalist Empire, US Capitalism, Indian and American State Terrorism/ All kinds of Nuclear Weapons and Crime, the uncultivated Education System/Corruption, /Violence, and Environmental Degradation. He is the one who wants rights for those who are the sufferers of the disabling environment, "the Workers/Peasants/Tribals/Dalits/Abandoned Ladies and gents including children and Handicapped people." (p. 127). The activist Dr. Azad Vartya's unnoticed hunger strike for the rights of marginalized people shows how society's denial and exclusion failed to stop the eleven years, three months, and seven days of his protest. One of his arms wrapped from shoulder to wrist in a filthy white plaster symbolizes that he is also one of them. Metaphorically, Roy tries to accommodate different types of disabled characters under the same roof and how they combat society's disabling process.

Maryam Ipe, Tilo's mother, is also a revolutionary English teacher who defied norms, and instead of making a family, she dedicated her life to her career. Later, she started her school, especially famous for "innovative teaching methods" (p. 239). She raised Tilo, claiming her child as a foster child to give her social acceptance. Naga would justify his mother-in-law's decision for a child "born out of wedlock_ and masquerading as the baby's foster -mother- was an act of immense courage and love." (p. 240). Maryam's queer motherhood and womanhood are also resistance against the state-sanctioned heteronormativity and repression of sexual, gender, caste, and religion-based minorities.

A HOPE OF RESISTANCE AGAINST THE DISABLING PROCESS

Foucault has rightly stated- "No matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience and oppositional grouping." (p. 245). Here in *Ministry*, Roy has

sketched the bizarre and deplorable socio-political aspects of India where people of myriad ethnic and cultural identities have amalgamated, but she also has envisioned an upcoming resistance emerging from India's marginal misfits. As mentioned by Thomas (2012), Edward Said claims that the margin is a site of resistance. Similarly, the concept of disability coincides with the potential of special abilities. The visible resistance begins with Musa in the novel. Musa justifies his struggle for Azadi or freedom as a struggle for lost dignity that people from almost every Kashmiri family have gone through. "In every single household, something terrible has happened... now it is a fight for dignity." (Roy, 2017, p. 370) In the entire narrative, Musa's existence marks how the marginalized become specially abled when cornered to the point of exclusion. Alongside the examples of Anjum's setting of Jannat Guest House and funeral services for the undrivable sex workers and Dalits, Musa's active participation in underworld resistant forces, Maoist Ravathy's active participation in political activities as the mother of Udaya Zabeen, and Dr. Azad Bhartya lay bare the fact that none of the excluded ones are powerless. No matter what, people find a way out to resist the disabling forces that trample down their happiness in one way or another. The minute description of the recurrent appearance of flowers on the road where previously a revered mazar –grave- was destroyed exemplifies the power of resistance. Roy also shows that the disabling process that society adopts to survive at its best is a suicidal process itself through the character of Amrik Sing, who later kills his family members and himself out of terror as his misdeeds haunt him. She puts her criticism in Musa's words- "One day, Kashmir will make India self-destruct in the same way. You are not destroying us. You are constructing us. It is yourselves that you are destroying." (p. 433-434). Kashmir is just one of many examples of several visible and invisible processes of othering/ victimizing and disabling the individuals that Roy has tried to capture. Mandes & Lau has opined, "The narrative of *TMOUH* opens up space for alternative support networks and new family structures, unconventional refuges, and homes (such as graveyards) as places of shelter, protection, and belonging" (p. 70) against the vulnerability of the people who live at the margin and go through the disabling Process. Roy, here in this novel, indeed, deliberately screws the idea of *normalcy* to showcase abnormality that lies everywhere, leaving the marginal people disabled. In an interview, Roy, says- "Well, you have to understand that, that is the building block of resistance. If they get you to lose hope, if they get you to lose joy, If they get you to lose entirely your peace of mind, your ability to love, your ability to focus on small things, then they won" (*One on One with St. Louis Literary Award Winner Arundhati Roy*, 2022, 28:38). Thus, with the thread of hope, Roy knitted all the characters living on society's periphery. Roy restores them to a new space that challenges the constructed ab/normalcy.

CONCLUSION

Disability is a much-discussed issue in social science, where individuals' physical inability and impairment remain at the focal point of discourse. In contrast, this article discusses some invisible disabilities that society thrusts upon people by disqualifying them for their bodily/ideological/religious, and ethnic differences. Using the Socio-cultural model of disability to assess the individual and society on the literary ground is a unique attempt. The paper takes a close introspection into Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* through the lenses of the socio-cultural model of disability, much discussed and popularised by critics like Harlan Han, Devlieger, Thompson, and Waldschmidt, and finds out that the idea of disability is not limited to an individual. Acceptance of physical, ideological, and cultural diversity is indispensable. In its pursuit of normalization, and expectations of segregation from the mainstream left, today's disability politics focus on reintegration, visibility, inclusion, and the right to meaningful public participation. Anjum is an excellent example of someone who struggles for reintegration, visibility, inclusion, and the right to the meaning of public participation. Similarly, Saddam struggled for inclusion not simply because he wanted visibility but also because his abilities were being challenged, denied, and destroyed for his Dalit identity. Musa's loss and the irreparable damage to his family as well as to his creative zeal has left him disabled in such a manner that he spends the rest of his life as a revolutionary, as an outcast. Tilo's nonconformist gender roles and the troubled childhood barred her from having a harmonious family life. These social minors are treated as disabled both explicitly and implicitly which eventually leads them to acquire some

special abilities to fight back against the pressure of norms of the society. For example, Aftab becomes Anjum; Dayachand becomes Saddam; and the architect and obsessive horse sketcher Musa to a revolutionary fighter, Anjum's binary, an unconventional woman, Tilothama or Tilo, all the characters here create their own space and the sense of belongingness that the society fails to offer them. The characters, almost non-existent others of society, sealed in the burial chambers, dismantle the elegy of dying alive. Our society's limited scope/space often creates binaries, targets minors or people born with differences, and excludes them. The exclusion and disqualification often make them dysfunctional and thus disable them, if not literally, then figuratively. However, as an author, Roy is not a pessimist. Her ministry is a story of the restoration of hope as well. The dysfunctional beings in this novel fight against the normative gaze and build up resistance against the disabling forces of our society.

In the evolutionary world of change, society should unlock the ego of upholding the hegemony of the binaries and create room for all to open their spirits. Roy challenges the normative established issues that constrain understanding of the politics of representation and marginalization. Thus, this study of Roy's inclusive narrative *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, from the perspective of disability as a socio-cultural construct, provides a new insight into the process and consequences of the othering, marginalization, and exclusion which may inspire the emerging researchers in the field of literary studies to carry out further researches on this less discussed issue of invisible disability in our society represented through the works of literature.

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