

Exploring The Complexities of Traumatic Experiences of Transgenders in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 11 Nov 2023; Received in revised form: 15 Dec 2023; Accepted: 22 Dec 2023; Available online: 31 Dec 2023</p> <p>©2023 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords— Gender Identity, Transgenders, Trauma, Social Construction.</p>	<p><i>This paper delves into the detailed portrayal of traumatic experiences among transgenders in Arundhati Roy's <i>The Ministry of Utmost Happiness</i>. Employing a qualitative analysis approach, the study examines the various dimensions of trauma by shedding light on the psychological, emotional, and physical distress faced by the central character, Anjum, a transgender woman. Trauma was an enduring emotional reaction frequently triggered by a distressing incident. Going through such an event can damage one's feeling of security, self-perception, and capacity to manage emotions and interpersonal connections. According to the lay perspective, "the trauma experience occurs when the traumatizing event interacts with human nature. Human beings need security, order, love, and connection. If something happens that sharply undermines these needs, it hardly seems surprising, according to the lay theory, that people will be traumatized as a result" (Alexander 2012). Through the mechanism of theoretical framework of trauma theory, the analysis uncovers Anjum's trauma caused by gender identity, societal norms, and the quest for self-acceptance and replicates Anjum's recovery from her traumatic experiences and her help for other suffocating humanity. Finally, with the leading character Anjum, the study states that humanity is an adequate source of survival, whereas the existing social norms on gender identity are social construction.</i></p>

Transgenders are diverse in their gender identity- biological (the way you feel a sense of being male, female, or something else from an internal perspective), gender expression- behavioural (the way a person conveys their gender identity through their behavior, clothing, and actions), and sexual

orientation - affectation (the people they are attracted to). The term transgender describes people whose gender identity differs from the sex at birth. Transgenders identity and behavior do not adhere to traditional gender stereotypes. Firstly, stereotyped gender norms are societal beliefs and expectations

about how an individual should behave, think, and present themselves based on their gender, often reinforcing rigid ideas about masculinity and femininity. Similarly, In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of Identity*, Butler (1990) says that gender isn't an inherent reality but rather a product of societal norms, suggesting that concepts of gender identity and distinctions are shaped by social influences and reinforcement. Therefore, according to Indian traditional gender norms heterosexuals are considered normal but nonconforming gender are seen as abnormal, to some extent a shame of society. Varsha Sharma, Arun Kumar Poonia (2023) in an article state that "The Indian Society, firstly, holds heterogeneity as a standard norm for both men and women. Any deviation from this position is punished by the society, and those who believe in the concept of homosexuality are seen as deviant and abnormal". Similarly, Sheena Asthana, Robert Oostvogels (2001) in an article "The social construction of male 'homosexuality' in India: implications for HIV transmission and prevention" states that homosexuality is not recognized as a socially significant category. Therefore, transgenders result in a nonconforming gender often face extremely intense challenges while being exposed to society. These challenges pave the way for various forms of trauma.

Secondly, the paper argues by stating that gender identity and gender are constructed by society, as Michel Foucault argued that "sexuality is not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category of experience that has historical, social, and cultural, rather than biological, origins" (Spargo, 1999, p. 12). A person's sense of self is shaped by their physical appearance, and societal attitudes towards sexual identity often serve as oppressive and negative forces. This leads to power dynamics established and controlled by certain groups, resulting in hierarchical divisions based on social, political, and economic factors. Woodward (2003) wrote, "The world was ordered by gender divisions, with gender giving meaning to social divisions" (p. 109). The social divisions are highly influenced by gender, impacting class, race, disability, and sexuality. According to Judith Butler, "gender is a social construction that imposes traits on people based on their assigned sex" (Butler 1990). A socially constructed category comes out of social and cultural practices that pave the way

to its own context of social and political dynamics. Therefore, the study used the quotations stated by the theorist as firm evidence for the argument and states that 'due to social perceptions of gender, sexuality, and identity transgenders face discrimination and segregation' that deliberately creates a traumatic circumstance in their life.

Transgender are targeted for their mismatched gender identity. According to the "National Transgender Discrimination Survey, a statistic says that 63% of transgender individuals have experienced a serious act of discrimination, and nearly 23% of transgender individuals experience a catastrophic level of discrimination due to the impact of life-disrupting events because of their gender identity". This increase in threat creates a constant state of fear and hypervigilance, contributing to trauma. In the life of transgender individual's trauma plays a vital role from the birth to the death. According to Jeffery C. Alexander 2012, trauma is an event that shatters an individual or collective actor's sense of well-being. Therefore, trauma refers to any distressing occurrence or situation that can affect an individual's capacity to manage and operate normally. It can also cause emotional, physical, and psychological damages. Rose (2018) states that the portrayal of trauma in literature is a key to understand real-life problems. Moreover, trauma within fiction looks into a sole character's traumatic experiences. At the same time this character can represent the traumatic experiences of a specific community. Transgenders are marginalized and devalued by the society. And experiences oppression and treated as "others". Transgenders endure trauma and humiliation due to their gender identity (Mizock & Lewis, 2008; Singh & Burnes, 2010), (Richmond, Burnes, & Carroll, 2012).

This study focuses on gender identity as one of the major root causes of trauma in the lives of transgenders through Anjum, a transgender woman. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy. Roy's work could be viewed as a necessary document of the increasing significance within the hijra community in India. Through the character Anjum, Roy has portrayed an encounter of internal and external suffocation of trauma and the challenges of a transgenders goes through in Indian society.

The character delves into themes of identity, acceptance, and presenting a nuanced perspective. In this research paper, Anjum represents the traumatic struggle of a transgender woman. The novel primarily focuses on Anjum, who has a multifaceted gender background. Anjum was born as an intersex baby, with both male and female genitalia. He was first named Aftab and later Anjum. His or her mother, Jahanara Begum, was terrified of her own baby, and her reaction was to contemplate killing herself and her child (p. 8). Begum feels shame by giving birth to an hijra; even though she hides the truth about the child from her husband, as an intersex child, Aftab can't stick to one category and exposes his feeling of being trapped in a body that doesn't fit for him. Through his exposition, his or her father came to know about Aftab's secret life. Both his parents worked hard to cure his or her disabilities, but it was in vain when Aftab realized the feminine soul fit him perfectly. Subsequently, the transformation takes place from Aftab to Anjum, and she leaves her home to live with the Hijras community. As an intersex child, his or her gender identity doesn't adhere to the traditional gender stereotype. The societal expectation never leaves Anjum to be at peace; the humiliation she felt had never been so intense, hitting hard like self-inflicted pain. The form of social stigma, violence, and discrimination may profoundly trigger her mental illness and other disorders.

Subsequently, transgender individual's experience a higher rate of trauma and challenges when society fails to accept or reject or denial to understand their gender identity. That leads the transgenders to be emotionally, physically and psychologically distressed. According to Alexander (2012), trauma arises as a reaction to an abrupt shift, whether it is on an individual scale or a societal scale. Similarly, the study states that, through the character Anjum, the denial of acceptance of her gender identity causes her to be emotionally, physically and psychologically weak and abruptly shifts her life from home to grave. "She lived in the graveyard like a tree. At dawn she saw the crows off and welcomed the bats home. At dusk she did the opposite. Between shifts she conferred with the ghosts of vultures that loomed in her high branches" (p. 3). The comparison of Anjum with the tree in the graveyard resembles a dull, monotonous and lifeless being. So, the cause of

traumatic damage built Anjum emotionally, physically, and psychologically to be weak. Roger Luckhurst (2006) in "Mixing Memory and Desire: Psychoanalysis, Psychology and Trauma Theory" describes trauma as "Something that enters the psyche that is so unprecedented or overwhelming that it cannot be processed or assimilated by usual mental processes. We have, as it were nowhere to put it, and so it falls out of our conscious memory, yet is still present in our mind like an intruder or a ghost" (499). Anjum, let the traumatic hurt to blow around her like a breeze because she had nowhere to put it out.

The trauma faced by Anjum is complex and multifaceted; she is living for thirty years with her patched-together body, which creates turbulence in her mental state. The form of social construction upon gender by adhering only to the two choices of gender identity, which are male and female, creates a social rejection and misconception of nonconforming gender and homosexuals. Hereby, transgenders are rejected by the recognition of society. The lack of access to gender recognition neglect's identity, and it provokes a cutoff from societal basic commitments. Anjum experiences intense suffering as the orderly structure of her self-identity crumbles. The social denial of recognition of Anjum's identity negatively impacts all aspects of her life; rights to freedom, liberty, housing, education, and employment. Despite these turmoil, Anjum felt a feminine soul strongly deep inside her and it urges her to join in the hijras community. Although hijras have both male and female gender identities, they usually adopt feminine gender identity and roles. Likewise in an article Nur Ain Nasuha and Moussa Pourya Asl, states that "Although hijras have mixed-gender identities, they usually adopt feminine gender roles and adorn themselves with feminine attires. Hence, the word hijra has become an exclusive marker of the identity of transgender women and not of men" (Kalra, 2011). Similarly, Anjum adorn the motherhood quality in her first encounter with Zainab. "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" (p. 30). Here Anjum longs for motherhood and decides to adopt a neglected girl whom she names Zainab. Hence the urges of feminine soul want to recreate the loss of her life through Zainab. And Zainab becomes a source for Anjum's

traumatic relief by dumping her stress in narrating stories. As trauma is a response to an event that a person finds highly stressful and reflects in a growing body of traumatized people. In the novel, Anjum reflects her trauma toward Zainab, when Zainab was old enough to understand, Anjum began to narrate her bedtime stories. At first the stories were entirely inappropriate for a young child. Anjum somewhat attempt to make up herself to transfuse into Zainab's memory and consciousness to reveal her. As the following lines evidently show:

“As a result, she used Zainab as a sort of dock where she unloaded her cargo - her joys and tragedies, her life's cathartic turning points. Far from putting Zainab to sleep, many of the stories either gave her nightmares or made her stay awake for hours, fearful and cranky. Sometimes Anjum herself wept as she told them. Zainab began to dread her bedtime and would shut her eyes tightly, simulating sleep in order not to have to listen to another tale. (p. 32-33).

The above lines dictate that Anjum's traumatic distress has been dumped upon Zainab. This aligns with Cathy Caruth's perspective in trauma studies, stating that trauma doesn't merely document the past but reflects the impact of experiences yet to be fully processed. Hence, Anjum's trauma has been seen as a deeply disruptive event that profoundly affects her emotions and the perception of the world around her.

Besides these social traumas, Anjum faces a disturbing circumstance in Gujarat. When Zainab falls ill, Anjum turns to Khadim, a religious leader, who persuades her to visit Hazrat Gharib Nawaz's shrine in Ajmer for Zainab's protection. Anjum was prepared to travel with her friend Zakir Mian to Ahmedabad with him rather than risking herself harassment and humiliation. A few days later, Anjum encounters a traumatic situation in Gujarat. A railway coach had been set on fire. Sixty Hindu pilgrims were burned alive. The police arrested hundreds of Muslims. In between, Zakir Mian was killed by the mobs in front of Anjum had shattered her, and she was left by mobs thinking that 'killing a hijra could bring back luck'. Besides all those social traumas, Anjum suffers from the situational trauma of social stigma. That is touching transgenders could bring bad luck or be

considered to be a bad omen. The social denial of acceptance creates distress, and fear for survival that results in trauma. Therefore, throughout Anjum's life journey, she faces extreme humiliation because of her patched-together body, which causes traumatic distress. correspondingly in an article of Trauma theory states that “A traumatic event is often an event which leads one in to an immediate confrontation with the reality or possibility of death, a confrontation which leads to a new and sudden awareness of one's mortality and vulnerability, something which serves to deeply upset one's psychic state”. Anjum's traumatic event was not just an event; it led her to an immediate confrontation with reality in her behavior. “Where he found Anjum in the men's section and brought her back to the khwabgah” (p. 46). The immediate confrontation with physical violation, injury, exposure to extreme violence, and witnessing grotesque death create an increasing possibility of harm in her psychic. As a result of her panic distress, Anjum's traumatic symptoms make her disconnect from the source of her desire. As a result, Anjum was found among men instead of women with men's attire.

“She had had a haircut. What was left of her hair now sat on her head like a helmet with ear muffs. She was dressed like a junior bureaucrat in a pair of dark brown men's terry cotton trousers and a checked, short-sleeved safari shirt. She had lost a good deal of weight. Zainab, thought momentarily a little frightened by Anjum's new, manly appearance, got over her fear and propelled herself into her arms shrieking her delight” (p. 46).

Anjum's distress leads to the feeling of unease, insecurity, and a lack of self-confidence regarding her feminine physique. Her alarm over distress turns into self-destruction as a response to trauma. People who have endured horrible events suffer predictable psychological harm. In Anjum's case, her horrible traumatic event of her friend Zakir murder and untouchability leads her into a confusion between psychological and emotional desire and causes a psychic detachment in her identity and consciousness, which frequently leaves Anjum in a

state of confusion, fear, and disturbance. As an effect of psychic separation, Anjum has been founded among men with manly appearances, which contradicts her emotional desire for a feminine physique.

In the "Introduction" to *Transmitting the Unspeakable Through Literature and Art*, Nossery and Hubble state that "trauma is a separation force that can render its victims silent or incapable of grieving. Horrific events, experienced in the community or individually, encumber the victim as they resurge unexpectedly and continually in the present. Past trauma constantly contaminates the present, and the present is haunted even when resistant to the past. The victim suffers the aftershocks and struggles to accommodate the enduring physical and mental anguish" (Nossery and Hubble, 2013. Pg. 01). Anjum's trauma forced her to separate or dissociate from the current world (Khwabgah i.e. dream house). All she needed was to be left alone from others. "What Anjum wanted was to be left alone" (p. 47). As a result of trauma, Anjum was quiet, disconcertingly so, and spent most of her time with her book in isolation. And she taught Zainab to chant the Gayatri Mantra, which nobody in the Khwabgah (dream house) could understand. The immediate confrontation of trauma deeply affects Anjum's psychic state and often keeps her in fear, so she trained Zainab to chant Mantra to escape from mob situations. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman states that "traumatized people relive the moment of trauma not only in their thoughts and dreams but also in their actions" (Herman 2015). Herman's statement about a traumatic situation has been seen in Anjum's life in the novel.

"One morning Anjum left the house, taking Zainab with her. She returned with a completely transformed Bandicoot. Her hair was corpped short and she was dressed in boy's clothes; a baby pathan suit, an embroidered jacket, jootis with toes curled upward like gondolas. 'It's safer like this', Anjum said by way of explanation" (p. 48).

Anjum's traumatic moment didn't stop with her dream; it started to reflect in her action towards Zainab. Her past societal trauma continually pollutes her present, and her present is haunted even when the

time after the danger is past. Traumatized individuals live through the event as though it were constantly occurring in the present. As Judith Herman states that "long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as it was continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts." (Herman 2015). Because of Anjum's trauma, she was unable to resume her normal life, and she was in uncountable fear that any horrible like Gujarat incident could come to her place. Anjum's traumatic fear disconnected her from the present world by forcing Zainab to be dressed up like a boy child. Whereas Zainab's wailing could be heard all the way down the street except for Anjum.

Anjum's traumatic event leaves her in an emotional and intellectual division between what she felt or believed before and after the event. And she finds that separation from the Khwabgah (dream house) could be her relief because of her traumatic experience. Anjum's psychic system of self-preservation seems to go on a permanent alert, as if the danger might come or happen at any time. After the traumatic event, Anjum believed in isolation and felt it could heal her and separate her from Khwabgah (dream house). A trauma theorist says, "Traumatic experience may be unspeakable, but it is not necessarily unrepresentable. Even if pain is a corporal expression of trauma, it can further isolate the victim with its crushing reminders of the event. In cases of hideous violence such as genocide, torture, imprisonment, and rape, conveying the experience through alternate modes of expression may, if not heal wounds left gaping for years and even decades, at least help the victim survive" (Nossery and Hubble 2013). As a response to the traumatic event, she separates her life in a graveyard, a dehumanized place used for the disposal of death bodies. Anjum finds peace in living in a graveyard with ghosts rather than with humans. And believes her desolation protects her. Anjum saves her life not only by protecting her but also by helping many people who are rejected by the world. Trauma has the potential to trigger both strife and suffering, but it can also cause a feeling of belonging and connection among those who have endured it. When Anjum moved to the graveyard, she created a sort of community, and she became an emblem of treasure by constructing the Jannat Geust

House in the graveyard, which serves as a shelter and provides funeral services for the people who are rejected and humiliated by society.

CONCLUSION

The paper finds that, in the novel, Anjum has been failed to recognize and accept her performance act by society. The lack of social and family recognition and acceptance leads Anjum to experience trauma. With the effect of traumatic experiences, Anjum isolated herself in a graveyard. Here, Anjum's isolation leads her to recovery by helping other humiliated people. According to Vickroy "Traumatized characters are offered clues and bits of memories to reassess survival and finally engage in new ways of thinking and being" (Vickory 2014). Similarly, Anjum comes out with the new way to lead her life by helping other suffocating people.

This paper concludes by stating that transgenders are humiliated by society because of their patched together bodies, where they do not fit into either the men or women category or to societal expectations. "Gender is a fluid attribute that can change based on a given context" (Butler 1990). So, with the theoretical evidence, the paper helps to rethink the context of gender. Firstly, the construction of gender is fluid in nature with changeable features because gender is a social construction. Hence, there are no fixed roles for a particular gender. Secondly, according to (Butler 1990), "gender is about performativity, which means the repeated gender normative action that creates and signifies a person's gender". So, performing gender is a fact where gender is created. So, gender can be identified by the repeated actions of an individual person, not by societal norms. According to Judith Butler's views on gender identity, "it's emphasized that gender is formed through actions and behaviors influenced by an internal essence, manifested by bodily expressions" (Butler 1990). Therefore, transgenders can be recognized through their performativity act rather than their appearance. Instead of rejecting them, we as a society should create a suitable environment for their lives without any anxiety, trauma, discrimination, or any kind of violence. Hence, transgenders are no longer a shame for society.

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