

ISSUE OF TRANSGENDER RIGHTS FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS

Devesh Kumar Chaturvedi ¹, Sheeba Himani Sharma ²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English, DDU Gorakhpur University Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

² Professor, Department of English, St. Andrew's Collage Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, India



Corresponding Author

Devesh Kumar Chaturvedi,
deveshchaturvedi258@gmail.com

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i7.2024.3577](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i7.2024.3577)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

A transgender person is referred to as a hijra in India. In India, hijra, the third gender, is connected to social-religious purity. People find it difficult to acknowledge the reality of hijra. In addition, the transgender protagonist is seen favorably as a key character in this fiction. It is possible to demonstrate that these texts provide further opportunities for emancipation towards the condition. It observes the transgender concern in relation to desire and connection. Transgender persons experience frequently, prevents them from exercising their fundamental right to an education and a normal life.

Keywords: Transgender, Gender Identity, Hijra, Gender Equality, Opportunities and Emancipation

1. INTRODUCTION

A transgender person is known as a hijra in India. The third gender in India, hijra, is associated with purity and social-religious aspects of Indian culture. As a result, the reality of hijra is difficult for Indians to acknowledge. The primary character, Anjum, and the environment she chose both demonstrated Roy's viewpoint. Thus, humanism is central to Roy's worldview. The study's two primary goals are to examine transgender issues from an Indian perspective. Furthermore, gender refers to an individual's choice to determine their identity, whether it is male or female or something else that was not assigned at birth. Gender identification typically follows genital sex, such as when a man identifies as a man and has his biological sex. On the other hand, transgender people identify as gender nonconforming based on their biological sex (Brandt, 2019). Transitioning is the process by which a transgender person acknowledges, embraces, their identity that differs from their sex birth (Yeung et al. (2019). The narrative examines the difficulties faced

by transgender individuals, such as founding the Jannat Guest House, standing up for oneself during a protest, and assimilating into the Khwabgah hijra society. The location that Anjum used and her role as the primary character both revealed aspects of Roy's worldview. Transitioning is the process by which a transgender person acknowledges, holds, and cements their uniqueness that define a transgender person as someone who does not feel like they fit into the stereotypical definition of male or female.

Although there is no correlation between the perception of surgical and hormonal reassignment of the feeling this person is in the incorrect gender. In addition, transgender individuals identify culturally with a gender spectrum and exhibit gender-neutral attire and behaviour. People who were classified as female at birth, for instance, take immense pleasure in projecting a masculine image through their attire, demeanour, and inner self. Because her gender choice defies her assumptions, she can identify as transgender. She may identify as transgender even though she is classified as gender-conforming since she does not feel the need to change her physical appearance.

When transgender people don't conform to established gender stereotypes, they can face violence and prejudice. The society held transgender violence and discrimination accountable for infractions against gender norms. Transgender people frequently believe that discrimination and prejudice against them are ingrained in society. Nowadays, gender identification is a major problem in society. Traditionally, humans have only recognized gender as either male or female. This statement is taken from *Language and Gender*. While sex is determined by a person's combination of chromosomal, endocrine, and anatomical characteristics that define them as either male or female, gender is frequently defined as the product of society (Eckert, 2013). Gender identification, however, can evolve into anatomical requirements, as in the case of a transgender individual. A transgender person identifies as gender nonconforming in various degrees and who is not biologically heterosexual. Furthermore, the transgender person's identity is independent of their medical and surgical care. Moreover, transgender refers to those who feel that their identity as male or female does not fit their physique. As can be seen from the preceding example, transgender people face difficulties and hardships in their daily lives everywhere.

As previously said, the author's worldview reflects the collective notion, sentiment, and way of thinking in which the author lives and comprehends group customs. It is not just coming out; rather, it is a process of learning about the values, customs, and culture through observation of the author's surroundings. The literary aspects that Roy would attach to the transgender issue, such as story, setting, and character, might be used to evaluate her viewpoint. As to the articles on *Sapiens*, Hijra is a guy by birth but can transform into a woman. It denotes that they adopt a feminine name, dress in feminine attire, and apply makeup.

The hijra community has historically faced discrimination from society. They frequently fall victim to hate crimes, such as unreported rape and assault (Goel, 2016). Roy offers moving lines regarding transgender issues in India, such as this one: everything had a gender, including carpets, clothing, books, pens, musical instruments, and living people. Everyone was categorised as either male or female, feminine or masculine.. Her statements discuss the emergence of the third gender and how it was not accepted by society as the dominant gender. She also talks about how the third gender is still frowned upon in her own India. In the meantime, the literary analysis diversity is connected to the practical meaning.

The sociology of literary criticism approach is anticipated to benefit from this research, particularly about the author's perspective on transgender people. It is recommended that readers be made aware of the presence of transgender people. Consequently, a larger society that occasionally penalizes people for breaking from gender norms may be the source of both violence and discrimination. The Hijra community is unique in India since they have separate gendered identities and follow socio religious beliefs. The Hijra, like other Indian communities, are linked to a customary profession in this case, ceremonial dancing for marriage and childbirth and they beg money from store owners, threatening to curse them and promising blessings.

Consequently, a larger society that occasionally penalizes people for breaking from gender norms may be the source of both violence and discrimination. The Hijra community is unique in India since they have separate gendered identities and follow socio religious beliefs. The Hijra, like other Indian communities, are linked to a customary profession in this case, ceremonial dancing for marriage and childbirth and they beg money from store owners, threatening to curse them and promising blessings. Anjum, the transgender protagonist and Hijra, serves as the primary vehicle for illustrating the transgender topic in this book.

Anjum joins the Hijra community known as "the Khwabgah," or "the House of Dreams," where transgender people coexist and use history to strengthen their group after deciding she wants to become a woman. Hijras struggle from their dual social standing as insiders and outsiders, even though "the House of Dreams" seems like the ideal place for them. Roy's novel has come under fire for its stereotypical depiction of transwoman Anjum and for paying scant attention to the struggles and triumphs of transgender people. By highlighting transgender people's resistance to heteronormativity in the following three crucial areas, my research will disprove this criticism. Hijras express themselves by dressing in openly feminine ways. Aftab sees Bombay Silk "in a shiny, green satin salwar kameez, gold high heels, and bright lipstick" on a spring morning (Roy, 18). Her gender performativity, which states that "no ordinary woman would have been permitted to sashay down the streets of Shahjahanabad dressed like that," indicates that she is a trans woman and not a typical woman. After being recognized as a Hijra in the Khwabgah, Anjum "was finally able to dress in the clothes she longed to wear – the sequined, gossamer kurtas and pleated Patiala salwars, shararas, ghararas, silver anklets, glass bangles, and dangling earrings" (Roy, 26).

Roy expresses her perspective on transgender people in India through the character. Roy claims that Anjum is a transgender individual who changed into a girl after being born into the incorrect body. She made the decision to integrate with Delhi's hijra community and become a hijra. In Roy's perspective, the hijra and other marginalized groups are represented. She depicts the tension between Anjum's society and self. She places Anjum in a trickier situation to demonstrate that there would be Anjum in real life in India. To show that Indian transgender individuals are not simply people, but also transgender people, Anjum involves herself in the transgender community and offers a thorough representation of transgender Indians.

Roy portrays Anjum as a Muslim in the Gujarati conflict, which causes Anjum to experience greater suffering and anguish in her life. Put another way, she incorporates momentous events like the 9/11 attacks in America and ties them to her main character. Her desire to teach the reader about America's influence on other countries as a superpower is evident in her writing. Arundhati is also in favor of granting hijra dignity.

Here are a few quick viewpoints regarding Indian transgender people, or hijras. Hijra was regarded as very intellectual, dependable, and devoted throughout the Mughal era (Michelraj, 2015). However, after the British arrived in India, attitudes regarding hijra shifted. Gannon claims that hijra were viewed by the British as the most repugnant and filthy people. The British likewise believed that what Hijra had done was abhorrent. In the post-colonial period, hijra people suffered in their lives. It is brought about by the rules and information that was established after the British arrived.

As a result, hijra stigmatization has remained negative. Roy claims that despite caste, religion, age, and the boundaries that come with being impoverished, elderly, or young, Anjum is a hijra who still values human tolerance. Being a hijra, Anjum endured brutality and non-humanism, and at worst, was treated as if she didn't exist. Nevertheless, Anjum managed to live in that kind of culture by being kind to others. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, Arundhati Roy addresses the third gender issue with other themes like communal politics, pollution, and poverty in urban areas, the Naxal problem, militancy in Kashmir, and displacement brought about by dams.

In India, the transgender population is stigmatised as Hijras and faces severe discrimination and hardship in their daily lives (Sharma, 2018). Anjum also endures mistreatment during the Gujarat riots following the Godhra event, when the mob mercilessly kills her old friend despite her best efforts to save him. When the crowd is about to kill her, one of the group members steps in to save her life by saying that killing a Hijra is a bad omen, or shaken. Being a Muslim Hijra causes her more humiliation and hostility than just being a hijra. She had previously believed that because hijras are not a part of any community, they are not vulnerable to caste or religious discrimination like other individuals are. Arundhati Roy's imaginary universe, a Hijra's search for happiness never stops, whether it is in the outer world, known as "Duniya," the "Khwabgah," where a variety of hijras can enjoy fantasies that never come true, or even in the graveyard, known as "Jannat Guest House," which is the end of life. "The Khawbgah was called Khwabgah, Ustad Kulsoom Bi said, because it was where special people, blessed people, came with their dreams that could not be realized in the Duniya," meaning that for transgender people, Everywhere they look is a "Khwabgah" where they have to constantly pursue happiness in order to exist, and where Holy Souls waiting to be freed from their incorrect bodies must wait. Holy Souls imprisoned in the wrong bodies were freed at the Khwabgah (Roy, 2017: 53).

The lives of the transgender community are deeply entwined with the numerous other lives that coexist with the historic city's prosperity. In Roy's fictional world, transgender individuals are given a voice, and the author shows her

constant support for them by depicting Delhi in a realistic yet amusing way. This is shown in the story's concluding scene, where Miss Udaya Jebeen creates a "puddle of the pee."

2. CONCLUSION

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness carefully considers Hijra's future. The novel raises concerns about the impact of non-binary gender expression on hijras' unique identity and the possibility that Trans identities may eventually supplant hijras without the need for concurrent third genders or community-based affiliations. The novel does, however, also recognise that this shift is not a criticism of the category's obsolescence, but rather a part of a larger negotiation of social space. The main character of the book, Anjum, is a hijra who works in a setting that is openly violent and stifles her individuality, both of which are encouraged by right-wing Hindustani ideas. But compassion and brutality had no effect on Anjum, who refused to go back to her former life at the Khwabgarh.

Anjum is visited daily by Imam Ziauddin, who requests that she read him documents. The analysis in the preceding chapter is summarised in this chapter. The researcher also intends to inspire other scholars to carry out further research in the future. The researcher was able to draw some conclusions about the investigation's goals after studying the novel in the previous chapter. According to the researcher, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness contains the novel's structure. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness by Arundhati Roy also discusses transgender issues and the author's perspective on the transgender community.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M. H. (1981). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Brandt, J. S., Patel, A. J., Marshall, I., & Bachmann, G. A. (2019). Transgender men, pregnancy, and the new advanced parental age: A review of the literature. *Maturitas*.
- Butler, J. P. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc.
- Chandiramani R and Berry LJ. (2005). Ethical issues in sexuality research and intervention. Jesani A and Jaitely TB (eds) *Ethics in Health Research: A Social Science Perspective*.
- Eckert, Penelope and Mc Connell Ginet, Sally. (2013). *Language and Gender*. Second Edition. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Emilia et, al. (2002). Gender Violence. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 42:1, 89-101
- Floyd MJ et, al. (2018). A Qualitative Study Of Transgender Individuals' Experiences Of Healthcare Including Radiology, Radiography. *The College of Radiographers*
- Gannon, S. P. (2009). *Translating the Hijra: The Symbolic Reconstruction of British Empire In India*. Ph. D Thesis. University of Alberta.
- Ghosh, B. (2018). A Diachronic Perspective of Hijra Identity in India. *Sociology of Motherhood and Beyond* (107-119). Kolkata: Levant Books.
- Goel, I. (2016). Hijra Communities in Delhi. *Sexualities*, Vol. 19(5-6) 535-546
- Goel, I. (2019). *India's Third Gender Rises Again*. Sapiens, 2020.
- Michelraj, M. (2015). Historical Evolution of Transgender Community in India. *Asian Review of Social Sciences*, 4 (1): 17-19.
- Muniroch, S. (2011). Understanding Genetic Structuralism From Its Basic Concept. *Lingua: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa Dan Sastra*.
- Nanda S (1990). *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Patel, A. (2012). India's Shunned Transgenders Struggle To Survive. Reuters, 17 May. Available at: <http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/05/17/india-transgenders-Hijra-idINDEE84G03220120517>
- Rahman, Sazedur. *Violence and Discrimination Against Hijra Community in South Asia*. Scoop. Retrieved on, 2020.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Hamish Hamilton, 2017.

- Sharma, Akhand. (2018). Identity Crisis for Transgender in India: A Case-study from Madhya Pradesh. *Quest-The Journal of UGC-HRDC Nainital*. 12. 157. 10.5958/2249-0035.2018.00021.9.
- Wiyatmi. *Sosiologi Sastra: Teori dan Kajian Sastra terhadap Indonesia*. Kanwa Publisher. Yeung. *Dermatologic Care for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Persons*, 2019.