

**THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS IN THE LIGHT OF
MULTICULTURALISM**

Md Ajmal

M. Phil. Research Scholar

Department Of English

Mssv, Nagaon

***Abstract:** Human being is a social animal and lives as a member of a family irrespective of their race, caste, gender, religion, and language etc. Our society is constructed with diverse cultures. Culture reflects one's identity, race, religion, language differences, life style, behaviors etc. It covers human feelings and emotions. Each culture has a separate boundary; it crosses its boundary, merges with the other culture and it creates cultural pluralism. Cultural pluralism or Multiculturalism connotes multiple cultural co-existence of the society. Multiculturalism maintains consistent identity with the help and contribution of cultural groups and it recognizes and respects the minority cultures. According to the Census of India, 2011: in India more than 19,500 languages are spoken and out of those it has 121 major languages, more than 3000 castes and communities, 06 major religions, several faiths and beliefs. Our India comprises multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic society. Literature reflects our society. Literature is a reflective form of culture that endures the great multicultural tradition and it denotes the significant changes of the social construction. Indian English literature always emphasizes on cultural pluralism and unity in diversity of our nation. Arundhati Roy, a prominent Indian English novelist who always enhances the present socio-political scenery with the light of multiculturalism. Her second debut novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* witnesses the aspects of multiculturalism.*

Key Words: society, culture, literature, multiculturalism.

Human being lives in a society or nation as a member of a family irrespective of race, caste, gender, religion, language and practice of individual culture. Culture exposes every human life and produces vivid environment. Culture inherits all the plurality of religion, race, caste, creed, colour, language, sects, architecture, dress, dance, music, dialect, ideas, and the way of life as a whole in the society. Culture imitates racial, religious, linguistic differences of human beings. It also exposes the distinctions, gaps, margins, disintegration, aloofness,

divisions, dominations, exploitation, superiority-inferiority, class struggle, gender discrimination, race subjugation and conflicts of the society. These differences establish different cultural ethnicities that are like melting pot or salad bowl or garden of nation. Our India is the best suitable example to understand culture and multiculturalism very clearly.

The concept of multiculturalism originated in the 1970s which is used in Canada for the first time to solve the problem of immigrants. Multiculturalism is defined as it is the co-existence of diverse cultures. As for example: A Muslim, Jain or Buddhist easily bends to a Hindu, when one comes to meals or funerals and assimilates and absorbs with the other. Sura P. Rath has defined it nicely, "Multiculturalism aims to establish a better global cultural community" (198). C.W. Watson observes, "To speak of multiculturalism society, then, is to speak of a society - a state, a nation, a country, a region, or even simply a bounded geographical location such as a town or a school- composed of people who belong to different cultures" (1).

In *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, Bhikhu Parekh mentioned: "It is neither a political doctrine nor a philosophical issue but actually a perspective on as way of viewing human life" (58). James Trotman in his book *Multiculturalism: Roots and Realities* states: "Multiculturalism is valuable because it uses several disciplines to highlight neglected aspect of our social history, particularly the histories of women and minorities and promotes respect for the dignity of the lives and voices of the forgotten" (66). So, the term multiculturalism is used to indicate a specific social and cultural school of thoughts that adopts the liberal and all reactive policy of cultural amalgamation.

Arundhati Roy (1961) is renowned as Indian fictional and non-fictional writer, novelist, an artist, actress, and political activist. Her first major novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997) for which she was awarded the Man Booker Prize in 1998. After 20 years, Roy published *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* in 2017. Arundhati Roy witnesses the social, religious, linguistic and political history of multiculturalism.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017) reflects the unified lives of numerous characters of contemporary India. The novel reflects her activism and empathy for the poor, the transgender Hijras, low caste Hindus (Dalits), Muslims, Kashmiris, Communist activists and Adivasis. Unity in Diversity is the main dogma of multicultural society. Bhikhu Parekh observes: "Multiculturalism is, in fact, not about minorities but is about the proper terms of relationship between different cultural communities, which means that the standard by which

the communities resolve their differences” (ibid 13). Arundhati Roy in her novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* narrates: “He electrified Hindu chauvinists (who were already excited by the Mother India map) with their controversial old war cry, *Vande Mataram* ! Salute the Mother! When some Muslims got upset, the committee arranged a visit from a Muslim film star from Bombay who sat on the dais next to the man for more than an hour wearing a Muslim prayer cap to underline the message of *Unity in Diversity*” (103).

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the main protagonist, Anjum, who is born as hijra and named Aftab, is initially raised as a boy but when he enters in adolescence, he rejects this male identity and joins in the Khwabgah, or “House of Dreams” (ibid 19)—a local community of Hijras. There are others who are Muslims, Hindus, Touchable, Brahmins, Sunnis, Shias, Christians and Shikhs. So, they themselves represent a very diverse community. But they look at the world and called it “Duniya, which means “the world” (ibid 24). Saddam Hussain is a low-caste Hindu called Dayachand from a family of skimmers. Saddam Hussein adopts his Muslim name and identity to get a job as a mortuary worker, and thence reverts to Dayachand for a security guard job “because every idiot knew that in the prevailing climate a security guard with a Muslim name would have been considered a contradiction in terms” (ibid 75). Roy explores diverse assimilated characters as S. Tilottama, or Tilo— she meets three men; Biplab Dasgupta, Nagaraj Hariharan, and Musa Yeswi and they become friend with her.

Religion never stands against the multicultural visions. Bhikhu Parekh says, “Religious people generally seek wholeness in their lives and do not think it possible or desirable to separate their private and political concern which is why many of them participated in anti-slavery, anti-colonial, temperance, anti- capitalist, anti- Communist and other movements” (ibid 324). In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* we find the reference of multi-religions: “She sat in a corner with her baby asleep on her lap, watching people, Muslim as well as Hindu come in ones and twos, and tie red threads, red bangles and chits of paper to the grille around the tomb, beseeching Sarmad to blessed them”(ibid 11).

Bhikhu Parekh remarks, “Multilingual deliberation is a valuable tool of inter communal education, enabling each group of citizens to appreciate and learn something from other ways of thinking and evolving a richer and expansive conception of public reason” (ibid 327). **Arabic Language**; “Aurangzeb, emperor at the time, summoned Sarmad to his court and asked him to prove he was a true Muslim by reciting the kalmia: la ilahailallah Mohammed-urrasul Allah- There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Messenger”

(ibid 9), **Kashmiri Language**; ‘*Kruhunkaal/* Especially not a *black girl/ Kruhunkaalhish/* Especially not one that was swaddled in litter */Shikasladh’* (ibid117), **Malayalam**; *Dum! Dum!Pattalam,* **Sanskrit**; “She was so small she almost fitted in the palm of my hand so I called her Tilottama, which means “sesame seed” in Sanskrit (ibid 240), **Telugu**; “Her name that I have given her was Udaya. In Telugu it means sunrise” (ibid 417), **Hindi** and **Urdu**; “*AiHai! Why so angry, jaan? Won’t you look at me?*”(ibid122) with English translation are copious in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.

In this way, social, religious, political and linguistic pluralism are exhibited with the narratives of vivid characters in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is more emphatic on the narration of the characters of middle and touchable classes established themselves that how they culturally assimilated with the other irrespective of religion, class, caste, gender, language etc.

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