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Justice, Dystopia and the Unlikely Utopia in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy's novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) tells the stories of a diverse set of disaffected protagonists on the margins of the social, economic, religious, and political systems of Indian society. Along with their stories, the novel also foregrounds the systems and structures that produce the injustices of their situations. These multiple narratives are delivered in a structure that has been described as sporadic and uneven in its register, and has come in for criticism. Exploring the relationship between the dystopian vision and the narrative structure, this essay presents a reading that sees the angular form not as a flaw but as a corollary to the disconnect between disparate human realities and the structures of power and justice inherent in the vision of the novel.

Keywords: Dystopia; Justice; Marginalization; Narrative Form; Utopia.

The idea that hovers over all the stories in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness,* and is the spirit that haunts it, is the subject of justice. Dealing with a whole array of characters on the margins of the social, economic, religious, and political systems of Indian society, the novel presents this world as dystopian. Roy portrays her disaffected and marginalised protagonists with a great deal of insight and empathy while also keeping the reader constantly mindful of the systems and structures that produce the marginalisation and the utter injustice of their situations. Roy received much acclaim for her novel but one aspect that elicited criticism is the structure of the novel that has been seen as sporadic, fractured, rambling, and so on. The review of the novel by Natasha Walter in *The Guardian* called it a "scattershot narrative," and while it acknowledged that this is deliberate, and reflects the "fragmentation in the world around us," the review still questioned the form of the novel, arguing that the "clashing

subplots and whimsical digressions can become rather unwieldy." Somak Ghoshal, writing for *Huffington Post* called the novel "frustratingly rambling" and "shockingly uneven in its register." The descriptions are justifiable. The question, however, is if the rambling narrative form, the unevenness of the registers, and the absence of a fitting closure in the structure are to be seen as failures in a potentially great novel, or if the form too is part of the message here.

This essay focuses on the issue of denial of justice to certain constituencies and characters and its relationship with the fractured narrative structure of the novel. The protagonists of the novel are a diverse set, with their unique contexts and histories: Aftab/Anjum, a transgender person and a Muslim; Musa, a Kashmiri; Saddam Hussain, a Dalit; Revathy, a radicalized communist; Dr. Azad Bhartiya, a general champion of several leftist causes; and several others. The protagonists come from vastly different social worlds, with differences of language, class, culture, religion, geographical location, and so on. The injustices and exclusions they face are also framed differentially in the contexts of politics, biology, caste, gender, etc., but what they do share and hold in common is the experience of victimhood. Their stories are told sequentially and then gathered together with some artifice at the end, when the plot brings them together in the space of the graveyard -- literally the place on the "margins,'' but one that is here visualized as an egalitarian space with a real sense of community. While as a metaphor this makes perfect sense, it is the actual bringing together of all the protagonists of the novel to this space to create an alternative realm of happiness that lends a sense of unreality to the novel. Is this a flaw in the novel? On the contrary, this essay argues that this artifice and unreality, along with the angularity in the telling of the tale, is inevitable, because within the ethos of the novel there exists no space for a "real" closure.

Having rejected the grand narrative of a hegemonic nation, having created characters located on the utter margins of the social and economic mainstream of Indian society and nation with no voice, place, or role within it, how else could Roy's *The Ministry* be narrativized but in the sporadic way that it is? The argument offered in this essay is that the novel cannot be presented as a unified narrative; it must remain heterogeneous because within the discourse of the nation, as seen and presented by Roy, there is no location or vantage point from where these injustices can be recognized and rectified. There is no narrative framework that can inclusively contain the dystopian world and the hoped-for utopia because the apparatus of justice belongs to the system that creates injustice. All the protagonists in the story are wronged by society or the state and its institutions, and thus

they cannot hope to receive justice because the very definition of justice and its institutions belong to the state.

The argument here is based on Lyotard's concept of a *differend* as opposed to litigation, a victim as distinguished from a plaintiff, and a wrong, as against a damage. To quote Lyotard, "[a]s distinguished from a litigation, a *differend* would be a case of a conflict between (at least) two parties that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments" (xi). Further, he observes,

> It is in the nature of a victim not to be able to prove that one has been done a wrong. A plaintiff is someone who has incurred damages and who disposes of the means to prove it. One becomes a victim if one loses these means. One loses them, for example, if the author of the damages turns out directly or indirectly to be one's judge. The latter has the authority to reject one's testimony as false or the ability to impede its publication. But this is only a particular case. In general, the plaintiff becomes a victim when no presentation is possible of the wrong he or she says he or she has suffered (8).

The idea here, especially in the context of Roy's novel, is that those oppressed and wronged by the state and its dispensations have no legitimate recourse to the correction of their wrongs. The focus in the novel is thus on the enormity of the injustice to them and the futility of any struggle to get justice. It is this exclusion and "victimhood," as stated earlier, that unites the protagonists in the novel; it also becomes the justification for a random bringing together of diverse characters to the alternative space of the "paradise" in the graveyard.

Implicated in this question of injustice and narrative form in Roy's novel is also the question of language, and of communication. In an essay entitled "In What Language Does Rain Fall Over Tormented Cities? The Weather Underground in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness,*" included in her recent collection, *Azadi*, Roy dwells on the centrality of the linguistic awareness in the novel and in the process of her writing the novel. She says that "*The Ministry* is a novel written in English but imagined in several languages," referring to the various ecosystems and constituencies that it encompasses (*Azadi* 13). And she talks about the need for these people "to coexist, to survive, and to try to understand each other," even if it is in imperfect translations (*Azadi* 14). The insight that the novel provides about the importance of language, that it is both the condition of marginalization of people and the weapon of their resistance, is seminal to the novel and the

question of justice. And this connection between justice and language, in and of literature, is crucially highlighted by Lyotard too. Lyotard states that "[w]hat is at stake in a literature, in a philosophy, in a politics perhaps, is to bear witness to *differends* by finding idioms for them" (13). Only in language, in idioms can wrongs be apprehended, and thus recognised.

Given the context of linguistic awareness in the novel, it is appropriate that the title itself is loaded and polysemic. The word "Ministry," in the context of the secular, "democratic" India, has the primary connotation of the governmental unit that incorporates both legislative and administrative powers. The irony it evokes here is of the absence in the structural conception of the nation/society -- there being no such Ministry – as well as the absurdity in the idea of there being such a Ministry. In its secondary connotation of a priesthood, the term "Ministry" also invokes an alternative possibility. Such a possibility implies that in the absence of the provision and protection of happiness of certain constituencies of people, the ministering work could still happen, with the work being assumed by self-appointed "ministers," such as Anjum in the graveyard.

The preface of the novel is a powerful piece of writing and contextualizes the novel in a haunting way. In disarming, poetic language and tone, it delivers a brutal message: the death of vultures by diclofenac poisoning caused by their feeding on the dead bodies of the cows that were fed the chemical in the interest of increased milk production. So, in the midst of the consumption of the abundant ice-creams and milkshakes, nobody notices the passing away of the birds that had existed for "more than a hundred million years" (*The Ministry* 1). The novel itself does not really deal with animal subjects but the use of bird references in the preface underscores a seminal point. Lyotard, in *The Differend* calls the animal "the paradigm of the victim." Here is how he explains it: "This is because the animal is deprived of the possibility of bearing witness according to the human rules for establishing damages, and as a consequence, every damage is like a wrong and turns it into victim *ipso facto*" (28).

Among these crows and the vultures lives Anjum, the protagonist whose portrayal in the first chapter is a feat of characterization. In just a few pages, Roy creates a character who lives in a graveyard "like a tree," but one who has such richness of emotions, human connections, loyalties, language, and laughter in the midst of destitution, rejection and loneliness that she seems to create a centre outside the periphery of society. Having given us this perspective on her, the novel tells us the backstory of her birth as Aftab, her parents' reactions to her bisexuality, her own discovery of her desires, her move to *Khwabgah*, her experiences in Gujarat riots, and

her eventual move to the graveyard.

At each stage of her story, what is emphasized is the idea that her identity falls outside any structured parameters of social existence. When Aftab's mother discovers the unformed "girl-part" lying underneath the "boy-parts," her response is described in phased and numbered reactions: after terror and recoil, she feels as if "she fell through a crack between the world she knew, and worlds she did not know existed" (8). She knows a word, really two, for those like her baby who are neither feminine nor masculine, *Hijra* and *Kinnar*, but as the narrative says, "[t]wo words do not make a language" (8). Later when she shares the fact with her husband Mulaqat Ali, a man with a passion for Urdu poetry who could produce a couplet for any occasion out of his vast repertoire, we are told that "for the first time in his life Mulaqat Ali had no suitable couplet for the occasion" (16). When both the mother's prayers at the dargah of Hazrat Sarmad, and the father's attempts at medical cure, fail to produce the desired results, Aftab, jeered at by the children for his feminine proclivities, withdraws from school and his music class, and begins to be drawn towards *Khwabgah*, the home where the eunuchs live. Aftab thinks of *Khwabgah* literally as it is named: the House of Dreams. So when he finally enters the place, it is "as though he were walking through the gates of Paradise" (20). Having faced social alienation, Aftab moves into *Khwabgah* at age fifteen anticipating bliss, but then he is assailed by the hormonal conflict within his body. Nimmo Gorakhpuri had already warned him of this when she had declared that god created eunuchs as an experiment of "a living creature that is incapable of happiness," because the conflict is right within the body: "the riot is inside us. The war is inside us. Indo-Pak is inside us. It will never settle down. It can't" (23). Ustad Kulsoom Bi, the head of the household, attempts to trace the history of the *Hijras* to the mid-eighteenth century in the reign of the Mughal Emperor Mohammad Shah Rangeela.

In the Sound and Light Show at the *Diwan-e-Khas*, "the Hall of Special Audience" at the Red Fort, Kulsoom Bi alerts everyone to listen to the "deep, distinct, rasping, coquettish giggle of a court eunuch," which to her proves that the eunuchs were never commoners but members of the royal palace staff (51). The only problem is that the said giggle is so fleeting that nobody actually hears it. Kulsoom Bi's efforts to console the *Hijras* "as beloved of the Almighty" also do not bring much respite. Gudiya, the only Hindu at *Khwabgah* tells a story in Hindu mythology, of how when departing for the forest with Sita and Laxman, Ram asked all the men and women to return home but forgot to mention the *hijras*, who then waited for him for the entire fourteen years of his exile. "So we are remembered as the forgotten ones?" asks Kulsoom Bi (51). Aftab, now named Anjum,

discovers that *Khwabgah* is as diverse and complicated as the *Duniya*, the real world she had left behind. And so, after more than thirty years, she leaves *Khwabgah* to move into the graveyard, which is in a way a return to *Duniya* (the world), and sets up Jannat (Heaven) Guest House, a refuge for those that are marginalized even from "the tightly administered grid of *Hijra Gharanas*" (68).

Anjum embodies not only the ideas of social exclusion, historical absence and biological conflict, but also of religious intolerance. These multiple realities come together in one incident, harrowing beyond recourse, during her visit with Zakir Mian to Ahmedabad that happens to be the time when the riots break out. Hidden within the story and told almost reluctantly, is the horror of their experience during riots: Zakir Mian was murdered by the Hindu mob while Anjum, lacking the courage to do anything, was found by the crowds lying on the street pretending to be dead, and was spared by them when she was discovered to be a *hijra*. "*Nahi yaar, mat moro, Hijron to maarna apshagun hota hai*. (Don't kill her, brother, killing eunuchs brings bad luck) (62). The memory of Zakir Mian dead, "lying neatly folded in the street" and of herself as "un-killed," "neither folded nor unfolded" becomes the nightmare that defines Anjum's existence thereafter, and this forces her to leave *Khwabgah* for the graveyard. As she tells Saddam Hussain, their very existence is questionable: "This place where we live, where we have made our home, is the place of falling people. Here there is no *haqueeqat* [reality]. *Arre*, even we aren't real. We don't really exist" (84).

The story of the Kashmir valley is told with deep sorrow interwoven with poetic lyricism but with a great deal of calmness, the calmness that comes with simultaneous sense of resolve and futility. It unfolds before us like a dirge, not just the story of Miss Jebeen the First, or Musa, or Tilo, a character who bears some resemblance to the author herself, but the story of the land and its people. It's a fight in which there is no possibility of appeal or justice, because it is a fight against the state. In an almost classic example of Lyotard's idea of victims as distinguished from plaintiffs, the Kashmiris engaged in this war are seen as having been wronged because they have been done "a damage accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage" because in this case, the "enemy" is the judge. The state that is instrumental in victimizing also has the authority to reject their "testimony as false," thus turning them into victims, as argued by Lyotard in the excerpt quoted above.

Kashmiri society is seen as conflicted within, and as undergoing complex and tragic changes wrought by the onslaught by the state. Martyrdom

and death stalk this land of beauty and death. Usman Abdullah, a prominent ideologue in the struggle for Azadi but representative of "the folksy, old-world stuff" is threatened, assassinated and finally replaced by the hard-line faction of militants (320). People face a dilemma because while they love the more secular leaders, they fear and respect the hard-liners who are better equipped for and skilled at war. There are strange ironies as when both Usman Abdullah and his assassin are declared martyrs, and are buried in the Martyr's Graveyard. The evolution of the struggle and the society is traced with a deep of loss and grief. Musa, a major protagonist in the novel, gives us highly nuanced and complex insights into the experiences of the Kashmir people. He talks about the inevitability of the war, the need to keep fighting without hope as a fight for dignity, even if the price for that is the terrible loss of their very humanity and complexity as a community. He calls it "stupidification . . . idiotification" of the Kashmiri community as it is forced to simplify, standardize and reduce itself to become an effective fighting force (371). So, in place of passionate intensity, there is steely resolve to continue dying as the last strategy of offence and defence.

Moreover, the war has also become a well-oiled commercial enterprise, and those with vested interests ensure its perpetuation. Major Amrik Singh has a flourishing furniture business that is very well integrated with his army work. Aijaz, the young boy captured by the army tells Naga, the journalist, that the army doesn't want the militancy to end as everybody "on all sides is making money on the bodies of young Kashmiris" (228). On the other hand, Aijaz himself is an example of the passionate, idealistic youth.

The Kashmir story is a crowded, fragmented, multi-faceted tragedy with all its actors seen as victims of one kind or another. The perpetrators of violence against the Kashmiris are themselves vulnerable, small figures battered by social, psychological, political troubles. Soldier S. Murugesan from Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu is very young, away from home for the first time, fascinated by the snow and cold in Kashmir. He is blown up and his body is received with a hero's welcome in his Dalit community in Thanjavur. The upper caste *Vanniyars,* however, would not allow his funeral procession to go past their houses, and they mutilate and behead his statue that is put up in the village to commemorate his valour. Major Amrik Singh, with "opaque, depthless black discs" for eyes, is "a deadly interrogator and a cheery, cold-blooded killer" (334, 336). A chameleon who could "pass himself off as a Hindu, Sikh, or a Punjabi-speaking Pakistani Muslim," he describes himself as the "Government of India's dick" whose job is to "fuck people" (336). Responsible for countless interrogations and

deaths, when finally deprived of the "infrastructure of impunity" provided by the state, he goes "scared and broke," killing himself and his family in a small town in the US (433).

The story, however, that is not elaborated in any great detail, except in the letter received by Dr. Azad Bhartiya about the birth of the child who "appeared" at Jantar Mantar is that of Revathi and the Maoist guerrillas in the Bastar forests. The chapter entitled "Nativity" presents the "appearance" of the child "on the concrete pavement, in a crib of litter" under the neon lights and surrounded by a thin white horse, a mangy dog, a lizard, two squirrels, and a spider. As the scene broadens, we realize that this child is born in a "shining" new India that is reaping the fruits of liberalization, with its economy growing and the multinationals coming in. The abundance of barely-veiled contemporary references in this chapter would be recognizable to anyone familiar with the goings on in the city of Delhi and around in the first decade of the twenty-first century, and a great deal of irony, sarcasm and humour in this chapter comes from this fictional appropriation of this history. To keep its capital bright and clean, begging is banned and a judge orders the eviction of the city's poor: the "surplus people," as the novel calls them (98). Jantar Mantar, New Delhi's favourite site of protests is shown to be teeming with umpteen causes: an old man with his campaign against corruption, Bhopal Union Carbide gas leak activists, Waste-recyclers Association, Sewage Workers Association, Manipuri Nationalists, Tibetan refugees, Association of Mothers of the Disappeared Kashmiri youth, and of course there is Dr. Azad Bhartiya fasting in support of all possible causes. While the writing deals with these with irony and humour, it is not difficult for the reader to distinguish between the causes the novel takes to its heart and the other ones.

To go back to the child left on the pavement, we learn that she was whisked off and given to Tilo who names her Miss Jebeen the Second after Musa's dead daughter, and cares for her in her apartment and then takes her along when she moves to Jannat Guest House where the child acquires another mother in Anjum. The circumstances of the child's birth are narrated by her mother, Revathi in her letter to Dr. Azad Bhartiya that he reads out to all the occupants of Jannat Guest House. Revathi's story is of a childhood spent in the midst of economic deprivation and caste discrimination and adulthood spent in armed struggle in Bastar forest. Her letter hints at the conditions of *adivasis* in the forest and the treatment they receive at the hands of the state police. In more detail, she describes her torture and rape by six policemen and the sequence of events after the birth of her child leading to her abandoning the child at Jantar Mantar. She talks of her conflicted feelings about the child, whom she wished to kill after her

birth but could not. She names her Udaya because the child was born at sunrise and calls her the daughter of the River and the Forest, giving her a symbolic dimension that is carried forward in the references to her birth as Nativity and of her being a saviour. When Tilo kidnaps the child, she knows that the birth of this baby is the "beginning of something," that there was yet hope for the "Evil Weevil World" because "Miss Jebeen was come" (215). All who hear Revathi's story at Jannat Guest House connect with it, recognizing something of their own stories in it. Miss Udaya Jebeen becomes a child of "six fathers," the six policemen who raped Revathi and "three mothers," Revathi, Tilo and Anjum who the novel says "were stitched together by threads of light" (427). The child's connections with her land of birth and her birth-mother are left hanging as question marks. When she grows into a girl, the narrative asks, would "she get a sudden whiff of the heady scent of ripe Mahua that had infused the forest the day she was born?" (139). Or is that connection broken forever? But what seems certain to Anjum is that Miss Udaya Jebeen's presence in the midst of the community at Jannat Guest House is a promise of a good future, with the novel expressing the optimism that things would turn out right in the end "[b]ecause Miss Jebeen, Miss Udaya Jebeen, was come" (438). It is important to note, however, that the novel makes no attempt to justify this optimism. It is articulated in a mythic language and is left at that.

The novel is the author's apprehension of the victimhood of various constituencies in society. Bearing witness, to use Lyotard's phrase, in language is the only way to resist and break free of the hegemonic structures of the state. The animal in Lyotard, exemplified by the vulture in *The Ministry*, becomes the ultimate victim in its inability to bear witness. Unlike the animal whose victimhood is apprehended in the language provided by the novelist, the human protagonists of the novel must be able to find their own idioms too for their subjectivities in addition to what is brought in by the writer. This centralises the consciousness of language in the novel, making it inherent to the conception of characters. In her essay, "In What Language Does Rain Fall Over Tormented Cities?" Roy makes clear just how innate the understanding of the relationship between language, hegemony, and justice is to the novel:

> Perhaps I shouldn't say this, but if a novel can have an enemy, then the enemy of this novel is the idea of "One nation, one religion, one language". As I composed the cover page of my manuscript, in place of the author's name I was tempted to write: "Translated from the original(s) by Arundhati Roy". *The Ministry* is a novel written in English but imagined in several languages . . .. And so, in this novel of many languages, it is not only the author, but also

> the characters themselves who swim around in an ocean of exquisite imperfection, who constantly translate for and to each other, who constantly speak across languages, and who constantly realize that people who speak the same language are not necessarily the ones who understand each other best (*Azadi* 13).

Injustice is apprehended by characters in myriad languages and communicated with each other in imperfect translations. Roy highlights in the essay the centrality of a linguistic awareness of their identities in the protagonists of the novel. Infant Aftab's complicated anatomy with both the male and the female reproductive organs is perceived by both her parents initially as a linguistic crisis. The mother, Jahanara Begum, faced with this gender confusion in her child's body, wonders if it was "possible to live outside language," because in Urdu, "the only language she knew, all things . . . had a gender" (8). While the narrator jocularly observes that Mulaqat Ali, a man with an Urdu couplet for every occasion, has no suitable couplet when faced with his child, in more serious tones is inserted into the narrative the historical currents of linguistic and religious politics that have determined Mulaqat Ali's marginalized position in modern India. As Roy observes in her essay, "It is when we meet Mulaqat Ali that we get our first hint of the fraught history of language that mirrors the fraught history of the Indian subcontinent" (36). The identification of Urdu as a Muslim language in modern India and its ghettoization is followed in the family history of Mulaqat Ali, who traces his lineage to the Mongol Emperor Changez Khan in thirteenth century. The ascendancy of Hindi and Sanskrit, and the weaponization of language in the Hindu nationalist politics is also brought out in Anjum's experience in the hands of the mob that kills Zakir Mian and leaves her alive because she is a *Hijra* (eunuch), but not before making her chant their slogan, "Bharat Mata Ki Jai! Vande Mataram! . . .Victory to Mother India! Salute the Mother!" (63). Later, in order to protect Zainab, her daughter from any possible mob violence in the future, Anjum teaches her a Sanskrit chant, the *Gayatri Mantra* that would enable them to pass off as Hindus.

Both the novelist and the characters participate in this process of finding idioms for these experiences. Roy also provides a rather dramatic metaphor for the difference in the use of language in her two novels: "I had to throw the language of *The God of Small Things* off a very tall building. And then go down (using the stairs) to gather up the shattered pieces. So was born *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*" (32). The shattered pieces of language in *The Ministry* are not to be understood in terms of some syntactical or narrative experimentation by the author. The multiplicity and fragmentation implied by this image relates more meaningfully to

the need by the diverse set of subjects wronged by state to articulate their victimization in their own different tongues, and then to reach out to each other through their imperfect translations to create a sense of community. In order to create space for these multiple marginalized and victimized subjects, the author too needs to speak in these multiple "languages," because it is the imposition of one language which is after all the enemy. The different stories of the novel are of people who belong to different parts of the nation, and literally speak different languages. When Dr. Azad Bhartiya ends his reading of Revathy's letter which she signs off with a "Red Salute! Lal Salaam!" Anjum's "inadvertent, instinctive response" is to reply "Lal Salaam Aleikum," mixing the Marxist and the Urdu greetings into a new incongruous but inclusive one. The narrative sums up the responses of the listeners thus: "Each of the listeners recognized, in their separate ways, something of themselves and their own stories, their own Indo-Pak, in the story of this unknown, faraway woman who was no longer alive" (416). The difference of language is both a reason and a sign of their marginalization in a state that aspires to the condition of a unitary nationalism. The injustices of their lives, however, speak across different languages.

This idea of languages, or in Lyotard's words, "idioms" in which wrongs have to be apprehended, has more to do with form and structure of Roy's novel than with its actual prose. Has Roy been able to bear witness and find the correct idioms for her protagonists? Yes indeed, for how else would such a reading ensue but for the novel having achieved it? Has the work also achieved the perfect form for it? That is a hypothetical question that cannot be answered. But another question that can be asked is if such a form would have been possible for this novel. The very idea of dealing with subjects that do not have an assigned place within the normative structure of society except as victims, is to admit the possibility of "formlessness" in its telling, of any kind of closure in its structure. But in finding the idioms expressing wrongs and the desire to correct those wrongs, the novel succeeds powerfully, and it does so with a great deal of humour, wit, irony, and inventiveness.

As stated in the beginning, the novel tells the tale of diverse characters in different contexts of systemic social and political injustices which they cannot realistically hope to overcome. What justifies their simultaneous presence in the novel is this sense of being victimized by an unjust system. It is this shared sense of exclusion from the dominant structures that unites the protagonists in the novel, and becomes the justification for their coming together to the alternative space of the "paradise" in the graveyard. The creation of this alternative utopian space in the graveyard is a

fiction and while it generates a certain emotion and a sense of community, it only exists in its own fictional plane. Jannat Guest House and its environs are affectionately created as an oasis at the end of the novel. There is a "zoo" with multiple animals, the soil being a "compost pit of ancient provenance" effortlessly springs up a vegetable garden that in turn attracts several varieties of butterflies, and Tilo starts a school (399). So, the narrative concludes that "things were going well in the old graveyard," and Anjum can look back at Jannat Guest House "with a sense of contentment and accomplishment" (400, 438). The optimism sought to be generated at the end of the novel through the redemption promised by the birth of Miss Udaya Jebeen is also rooted in desire rather than any promise of real change.

Duniya, the dystopian world describing the social and political realities of contemporary India and *doosri Duniya*, the wished-for utopia for the victims exist at two different levels in the novel and are conceived and presented in two different registers. The first is based on keen political engagement that Roy also demonstrates in her non-fictional writings and the second is an emotional articulation of the only possible resolution for the protagonists, a paradise in a graveyard, given the total lack of any hope of transformation and change in the real world. So, while the young people making the documentary film on Protest and Resistance at Jantar Mantar ask different people to say for their recording, "Another world is possible (*doosri Duniya mumkin hai*)," Anjum, without any consciousness of irony, says, "We have come from there . . . from the other world (*Hum doosri Duniya se aaye hain*)" (110). There is neither the possibility nor an attempt to connect the two registers, the two contexts of the dystopia and the utopian space in the novel. The fragmentariness of the form of the novel may then be seen to mirror the disparate and fractured worlds of its protagonists, and an honest result of the author's attempt to find their idioms and bear witness to their wrongs.

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