

The Reflection of Panopticon in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

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Abstract

This study aimed at highlighting the concept of panopticism in Arundhati Roy's novel The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. The novel explored the maltreatment with marginalized Kashmiri people by Indian military institutions in the name of search operations. The novel also investigated the surveillance techniques used by Indian military agencies in Kashmir which increase the weight of oppression caused by violent attacks on innocent voiceless people. In this study, these surveillance strategies had been observed under the lens of the concept of Panopticon presented in the work Discipline and Punish (1977) by Michael Foucault. Panopticon is an idea, given by Jeremy Bentham, of a jail architected in a way to ensure constant watch on the prisoners around the clock. The importance of the concept of panopticism couldnot be ignored, as the so-called Indian institutions continued surveillance of Kashmiri people.

Keywords: Marginalized, Panopticism, Panopticon, Surveillance, Voiceless

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Introduction

Arundhati Roy (1961) represents the writing style of Post-Colonial Literature. She makes a great addition in the area of Post-Colonial Literature. Her literary as well as non-fiction works highlight those problems which need great attention regarding identity-gain and self-respect in social life where the cornered communities

face many problems. Her voice is raised for the voiceless people including Kashmiris as well as marginalized groups or communities of the contemporary India. *The God of Small Things* is the first novel by Roy published in 1997. The novel was nominated for Man Booker Prize and won it. She wrote many non-fictions books on politics, injustice, human rights and environment. Almost long

awaiting twenty years later, her second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* came on the scene in 2017.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, her second published fiction, throws light on the Kashmiri people who are kept under complete surveillance by different institutions. These institutions are police, military and intelligence. Some individuals are also supporting them. These individuals are agents and journalists within Kashmiri society. Kashmir has been made like a panopticon for the Kashmiri people, militants and non-militants alike. Normal life is in chaos and the Kashmiri people are facing a lot of problems. They are being injured, killed, suppressed, and abducted. Their cultural life is being destroyed. They are being watched constantly. Any sign of suspicion can deprive them of their legal rights and rights of mobility and economic transaction. They are pushed to the position of the powerless and the power seems concentrated in the hands of those who are running either these institutions or designing the policies of control in the Indian administered Kashmir.

The story of Musa Yeswi is an instance of this Panopticon practice. Musa, graduate of Delhi, who later turns into a militant, loses his wife and daughter in an attack of army. His

family life is destroyed. He moves from one place to another to escape from being watched. He knows that everything he does is being monitored, observed and recorded. So, he does not occupy one place for an extended time. His father is an agent of military. One day when Musa is at home, his father informs the military. Military arrests him and punishes him in the name of investigation.

These institutions have made Kashmir a panopticon. In this kind of area, every person is under surveillance. No one knows who is watching him. It causes an air of mistrust in society. Social bonds get weaker and weaker. They cannot move freely even within the state of Kashmir. They cannot talk to each other because of their fear that the whom they are talking to may be an agent of the government or intelligence agencies. This is the aspect that I look at in the novel. I will explore the concept of panopticism in Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). This article will assist to elaborate the aspect that a work which is a representative one is significant in all conditions and eras. This study will also highlight the surveillance, searching, arresting and investigating of Indian police, army and intelligence agencies in Kashmir. It is useful to develop in readers a sense of great interest as the work

inspects closely the works from a special point of view.

Literature Review

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017) is a striking novel which explores the hidden aspects of the Kashmiri people which appeals me the most to choose this novel especially the topic of this research. There are a lot of debates going on about Kashmiris in the recent times. Since its publication, a lot of work has been done on the novel. Some articles see it as a magnificent work and call it a masterpiece written in vivid prose. Its beautiful structure has been discussed and the techniques of storytelling are also remarkable.

Tabish Khair's article (2017) calls it a perfect and more experimental novel than first novel of Roy, *The God of Small Things*. According to it, the novel takes the readers through almost every significant political event which has happened in the 20 years that it took Roy to write it. The novel also highlights the love story of Tilo and Musa. Musa is a Kashmiri who lost his family to a horror executed by the Indian army. What happens in Gujarat and Kashmir is discussed. A very effective thing which is written is Kashmiri-English Alphabet.

Parul Sehgal's article (2017) says that Roy has diverted her

consciousness from fictional work to the movements of people all over country-Kashmiri withstanding the Indian army's possession, communities of tribes battling for the protection of their forefathers' lands. She disapproves test of atomic bomb by her own country, India. She also does not approve the war by America in Afghanistan. After 20 years of her first publication, her recent fiction writing has come on the scene which is *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.

Alex Clark's article (2017) calls it an inquisitive monster: amazingly full of many characters, frequently achronological, written carelessly and zig-zag style but still it is capable to be composed in breathtaking manner and have forceful intervals. The novel takes its readers from the areas of Delhi to the valleys of Kashmir where the war between Pakistan and India is continued around Line of Control, changing the residents of Kashmir into wanderers, informers, fighters for religion and ready to die for religion as well and - as in a bullet enters the skull of a girl and her mother dies because of taking this incident to her heart - victims. As an activist for the liberty of Kashmiris, its complexities are less alive than Roy is, as one of her more detached characters.

Karan Mahajan's article (2017) says that the novel is concerned with the people thrown-aside socially

and politically. In response to state-assisted damage and destruction, they come together. Arundhati Roy is specially interested in Kashmir which is ambivalent in the novel. The novel is flaming with descriptions of Indian army and military's occupation and people of Kashmir are in deep grief and sorrow. Roy is well aware of the frightening sugar-coated army's wording and terms of the region. She pays attention towards houses, bomb blast sights, torture cells made by Indian military and graveyards. She unfolds the extinguished behaviour of the Kashmiri people upon the readers and Kashmiris are in state of battle with Indian Army and also sometimes bonding with them.

Joan Acocella's article (2017) says that the novel is related to India, the political organization, past fifty years or more duration, and the sorrows related to it are of national level. The remarkable thing in the novel is her combinatory genius. Roy goes out in the world of Kashmir. Mostly, the book's latter part takes place in the regions of Kashmir. The readers are shown terrible situations. e.g. People break the skulls of others, take out the eyes of other people. Dead bodies are present at every place, behind their backs feet are tied with hands, cigarette burns have covered them, which indicates the person was repeatedly tortured.

Chantal Da Silva's article (2017) says that Roy divides life in India and shows it with the eyes of two central characters of the novel: Anjum who is a transgender woman and Tilottma who is a well-trained architect. Tilo travels to Kashmir to reunite her love affair with Musa, a freedom fighter.

Alice Traux's article (1997) says that one tragedy in *The God of the Small Things* is the drowning of a child which is a great ruin for a prosperous Indian family.

According to Manisha Gangahar's article (2011), *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom* states the ground reality of the Kashmir region.

Batra's article (2017) discusses the narrative style of the novel and mentions it a mixture of two novels. One deals with the transgender people, the oppressed community and terrorist activities in Kashmir.

Research Question

Why is surveillance necessary to observe the movements of the Kashmiri people?

Research Methodology

Qualitative inquiry will be utilized as methodology in the article

of research. The reason is that aim of this article is to understand the working patterns of Indian police, army and secret intelligence agencies in Kashmir in Arundhati Roy's novel. To analyze the text, analytical approach will be carried out through *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). For the research purpose, both primary and secondary sources which are the text of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) and print and online critical available material on the novel respectively will be employed.

Theoretical Framework

The idea of the Panopticon is the base of concept of Panopticism presented by Michael Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Bentham, a great philosopher, offers Panopticon as a useful operative model for a prison. This prison is constructed with a tower in the centre to watch the prisoners. There are many separate cells that have circled the watch tower. The prisoners cannot talk to each other when they are in the cells. They are also unaware of the fact that someone is watching them from a watch-tower. Only one guard is enough to keep an eye on many prisoners. If the guard is not present, the prisoners think and react in a way as their constant surveillance is continued. Foucault takes this concept from Bentham for discipline in modern age.

For Foucault, the concepts behind the Panopticon and how they are utilized are really the process through which West passed in the past to be a disciplinary society. According to him, it is a work of power theory. In his book, *Discipline and Punish*, he narrates that how individuals are produced by disciplinary actions who, to the interest of powerful ones, act on their own.

Results and Discussion

This article argues that Arundhati Roy draws attention to the fact that the Kashmiris have been forced to live in a police state where their private lives have lost meaning. Kashmir has been made a war zone for Kashmiris. (Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 2017, p. 160). The panoptic situation exists in the occupied land. Kashmiris have no idea to whom they trust and who is with them. They are marginalized people. Indian police and investigation institutions maltreat with them in the name of search operations. We find many examples of this policing behaviour in the novel.

One of the characters of the novel Nagraj Hariharan (nicknamed as Naga) has a friend Imran, a young Kashmiri police officer. Naga is a fearless journalist and son of a foreign secretary. Although they know one another very well and Imran has done many undercover works for them.

Once they talk about Kashmir that this place belongs to animals not to Kashmiris, Indians and Pakistanis. Imran seconds him saying that he also thinks the same for India that it also does not belong to Punjabis, Sikhs, Hindus, etc. but to beautiful creatures like tigers, bears and elephants. Suddenly, Naga thinks himself that he must be careful for giving any comment about it and trust only on those who are on his side. "Not even the damn *police*." (Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 2017, p. 168).

Kashmiri people, militants and non-militants alike, are deprived of their freedom rights. They are not allowed to do anything according to their wishes desires. They cannot move easily from one place to another due to surveillance. If they do so, they are arrested and tortured in the name of investigation. Sometimes, they are killed during investigation. In Chapter 7 "The Landlord" which is a monologue of a senior army officer Biplab Dasgupta, he tells us about a military major, Amrik Singh, posted in Srinagar, Kashmir. Major Amrik Singh is the very person who is notorious as Amrik Singh 'Spotter' because he spots the militants hidden among the crowd of civilians. Biplab tells that when he reaches Srinagar, a famous lawyer and human rights activist, Jalib Qadri, is arrested by Amrik Singh on a checkpoint. Qadri,

on the night of his arrest, is going to Oslo for an international human rights conference. He is arrested only not to attend that conference. Amrik Singh does not formally register his arrest. Qadri is arrested publicly even in the presence of his wife. A great hue and cry arises. After a few days, Qadri's dead body is recovered from the Jhelum river which is floating with water. The dead body is found in a horrible condition. e.g. smashed skull, his eyes gouged out. (Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 2017, p. 175).

"Disciplinary Power", an essay by Marcelo Hoffman, gives an overview of disciplinary model of M. Foucault. Hoffman says "produc(ing) an organic individuality by exerting control over bodily activities". (Hoffman, *Disciplinary Power*, p. 29). In simple words, classical panopticism is a method to mould the people more easily for a specific situation that is favorable for the controlling hierarchic power. In Chapter 8 "The Tenant", Ashfaq Mir who is Deputy Commandant of the Shiraz Cinema JIC (a torture cell), captures a boy named Aijaz in an operation in an apple orchard near Pulwama. Aijaz, according to Ashfaq Mir, belongs to a militant organization. Ashfaq tells Naga about the boy that after his arrest and spending time with them, he thinks them as their family. He has

forgotten his past. He feels himself safe with them. He is ready to work for them. Many other boys like him are there to work with them. (Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 2017, p. 225).

When Naga talks to the boy, Aijaz and asks him to say anything what he likes. He stares Naga for a moment. He knows Naga very well. Naga is well known in militant groups as a brave journalist. Aijaz requests him that if you want to write something about him, he must write the truth. He tells Naga that what Ashfaq Mir has told him is not true. They have tortured him. They have given him electric shocks. They have made him sign a blank sheet. They do this with everybody who is brought here. He doesn't know what they have written on the blank paper later. He has not forgotten his past. (Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 2017, p. 227).

Kashmir has been made a war zone by Indian military and police. Death dances everywhere. Everyone is dying either he belongs to militants or not. Arundhati Roy says "As the war progressed in the Kashmir Valley, graveyards became as common as the multi-storey parking lots that were springing up in the burgeoning cities in plains. When they ran out of space, some graves became double-deckered, like the buses in Srinagar that once ferried tourists between Lal Chowk

and the Boulevard." (Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 2017, p. 319).

Another instance clearly indicates the cruel working pattern of Indian soldiers in Kashmir. They are not accountable to anyone for killing Kashmiri people. In Chapter 9 "The Untimely Death of Miss Jabeen The First", a funeral procession of a militant Usman Abdullah passes from a lane. The procession has to pass a large bunker of the 26th Battalion of the Border Security Force. Suddenly, a less loud explosion occurs. The soldiers come out of the bunker, start firing at the crowd of the funeral procession without knowing the reason of explosion. They kill everyone. Some frightened soldiers move their machine guns towards those who are watching the funeral procession from the windows and balconies. A little girl Miss Jabeen and her mother Arifa also die in that firing. Later, it is come to know that the blast is due to a driving car which crushes an empty juice carton. Roy says "Usman Abdullah's coffin and coffin-bearers were hit. His coffin broke open and his re-slain corpse spilled on to the street, awkwardly folded, in a snow-white shroud, doubly dead among the dead and injured. Some Kashmiris die twice." (*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 2017, p. 323-324).

Indian military agencies use different surveillance techniques to

keep eyes on Kashmiri people. They have even Kashmiri spies who give them reports of their own relatives on the basis of suspect. The people, killed in funeral procession of Usman Abdullah by bunker soldiers, are buried in Mazar-e-Shohadda. The soldiers have surrounded the Mazar with clear instructions to hold their fire. Roy says "Their informers (brothers, cousins, fathers, uncles, nephews) who mingled with the crowd and shouted slogans as passionately as everybody else had clear instructions to submit photographs and if possible videos of each young man." (Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 2017, p. 329).

Indian soldiers visit the houses of Kashmiri people. They knock at the door, ask the name of the person, his father name and name of job place. Sometimes they stop Kashmiri at a checkpoint and take him aside to inquire him all these things. This threat goes no further than that. A man's personal information when throws at him is sufficient to change the way of life of his. (*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 2017, p. 329).

Musa Yeswi is a Delhi graduate. He is the father of Miss Jabeen and husband of Arifa who both have been shot by bunker soldiers. Musa's father Showkat Yeswi is a building contractor and works closely

with the Military Engineering Services, supplying building materials to them. When a militant organization begins in 1990, he starts working with the Indian army. Musa tries to stop him but he continues to work. When he realizes that Musa has joined a militant group, he informs Amrik Singh. He arrests Musa just to investigate him and takes him to Shiraz Cinema which is used as an investigation cell. After some time, he is released from the cinema. (*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, p. 330).

Conclusions

It can be concluded that *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* shows the cruelties of Indian military institutions in Kashmir. This study attempts to highlight the surveillance techniques used by Indian intelligence agencies in Kashmir. In this article, it is also attempted to focus how Kashmir has been made a panopticon for the Kashmiri people. They are not free to move anywhere. They are stopped, asked questions, tortured and killed without any reason. They have no idea that their brother, father, friend or uncle is a spy of Indian army. Due to this, their social and family bonds have become weak. The cultural life of the Kashmiris have been destroyed. Kashmir has become a war zone. This study also analysis the working

patterns of Indian army in Kashmir. It also shows Roy's depiction of maltreatment of Indian military institutions in Kashmir.

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