Spivak’s gender based Subaltern Concerns and Gendered Subalternity in Arundhati Roy’s The Ministry of Utmost Happiness

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Abstract
The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, is a superb exemplum of fiction at its best while highlighting the issues of marginality and subalternity. It is a story of human resilience and determination. The incendiary borders in the novel create solidarity as opposed to alienation. Roy declares that she is an optimist. She gives a direction to directionless, a new strength and vigor to the marginalized subalterns, and a voice to the voiceless. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness depicts Arundhati Roy’s attempt to bring all the subalterns and marginalized castaways of India under one roof. The present research has been conducted to fill up the gaps present in the subaltern perspective. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s theory of subalternity is specifically gender based. Roy depicts a typical Indian society, in this saga of subalterns. All the characters are trying to reclaim their identities and they emerge triumphant at the end when they rediscover the true meanings of life, while facing their respective dilemmas of existence.

Keywords: Subalternity, Gender, Marginalized

Introduction:
The present research focuses on the Postcolonial definition of Subaltern, by the philosopher and theorician Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and its dynamic evolution since its first introduction by Antonio Gramsci, with special reference to Arundhati Roy’s The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. Gramsci was a Communist Scholar who fought against Mussolini’s Fascist regime. He was the first person to use the term subaltern for the underprivileged people. The term was used by the Subaltern Studies Group in South Asia. But it was Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who evolved this concept of
subaltern and her theory covers a large number of topics; as Deconstruction, Feminism and Marxism are of great importance. Spivak has used different critical perspectives particularly her critical theories and cultural studies challenged the legacy of Colonialism. She refused the Western notions as having an upper hand over the third world countries. Her critique raises the issues of marginal subjects such as the place of the subaltern women, as well as other marginalized social groups. She also highlights their lack of representation and raises voice for their empowerment. She speaks for the subaltern’s lack of access to the revisionist history. Though the people wanted to challenge the colonial authority, but they were trapped into its power structures and impacts.

Significance of the Study

The current research is significant as Spivak’s theory of Subaltern and its dynamic conceptualization has been researched in different perspectives, but Subalternity has never been researched in the perspective of Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Kashmir’s struggle for independence, and the hegemonic Indian military occupation covers the major part of the novel. Moreover, the oppression towards other religious minorities, lower class and lower caste people, women and trans genders who are portrayed rediscovering their shattered identities are the major themes of the novel. The current research will also focus on the point that how Arundhati Roy highlights the key issue of India being a colonizer and a colonized simultaneously. Such issues of porous borders and shattered identities will be discussed.

Delimitation of the Research

The current research is delimited to Arundhati Roy’s novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017).

Research Statement

Subalterns are those people who do not have access to the revisionist history; they cannot speak and cannot represent themselves as they are represented. They are the marginalized and oppressed people, made through different ways and different from common people. Every common person can be marginalized but cannot a subaltern but every subaltern can be a marginalized one. The current research analyzes the Trajectory of subalternity in Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.

Objectives of the Research

1. To rediscover and redefine the trajectory of subaltern and its dynamism particularly in the South Asian perspective.
2. To explore the shattered identities of lower class people, Kashmiris, Maoists and transgenders.

Research Questions

1. In what way the “Subalterns” lack representation and voice in the Indian context?
2. How the minute social divisions, institutionalized hierarchy, genders, nationalities crush the people and hold them down in a grid?

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

3. For the recent research, I have selected Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s theory of subalternity expounded in her highly esteemed essay “Can the Subaltern Speak” (1988), and its origin from Gramsci as the outcome of hegemony as well as its dynamic evolution since it was first used, as a hybrid theoretical framework, to be used for foregrounding as it opens up new avenues of discussion for subalternity.

4. In critical theory of postcolonialism, the word subaltern stands for those people who are geographically, politically and socially exploited and existed outside the hegemonic power structures those are designated by colonial master. The term “Subaltern” was in fact coined by Italian Marxist Economist Antonio Gramsci, in his work on cultural hegemony, which focused on groups that were excluded from established social institutions and so they lacked proper representation.

5. This term became a dominant feature of postcolonial studies, especially the Subaltern study group. The Marxist historians used this term with reference to the proletariat. In 1970s the term subaltern was used in the Indian Subcontinent to denote the colonized people. In intellectual discourse the concept of subaltern emerged as a Eurocentric method of historical inquiry for the study of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In Indian Subcontinent this intellectual discourse emerged as a form of “vigorous post-colonial critique”.

6. The postcolonial theory, especially Orientalism (1978) by Edward Said, conceptually addresses oppressed people, as subalterns. Moreover, Spivak’s line of reasoning developed and burgeoned in Joanne Sharp’s Geographies of Post Colonialism (2008), who proposed that the western intellectuals relegate other, non-Western forms of “knowing”, of acquiring knowledge of the world. In order to be heard the subaltern must adopt Western ways of thinking and reasoning.

7. Spivak converted deconstruction into cultural paradigm. She overturned conventional wisdom and trendy clichés. Subaltern is a place of disempowerment, without identity. Spivak ends up her essay by saying that a subaltern cannot speak and even if he speaks he remains unheard. Ranajit Guha, a founding member of the Subaltern Studies Group viewed subalternity in the class based perspective.

8. The current research is analytical, exploratory, and interpretative in nature. The researcher adopts qualitative approach to investigate Arundhati Roy’s The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, with detailed textual analysis, which is largely used in literature. Subalternity will be viewed through
Spivak’s theoretical lens, Gramscian introduction of subalternity and its dynamism since it was first conceived, in order to critically analyze the character sketches and dominant themes of the primary text.

**Literature Review**

Post-colonialism has sprouted as the most prestigious and widely discussed literary discipline during the recent era. The subdivision of Post-colonial literary theory into Subaltern Studies group, in 1980s by the Indian Scholars provoked a controversial and problematic debate in Indian historiography. The historical origin of the word “subaltern” can be traced out in *The New Shorter English Dictionary* (1993). According to the dictionary, during the late-medieval English this word was applied to vassals and peasants. By 1700, this word was used for the lower rank military officers especially from peasantry.

In 1800, this term was used for the works of the authors, who wrote about military campaigns in India and America “from a Subaltern Perspective”. G. R Gleig mastered this genre in his biographical histories of Warren Hastings, Robert Clive, and Thomas Munro. During World War 1, the diaries and memoirs of the subaltern life were popular.

After the Russian Revolution, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) a Communist theorist, postulated his theories around this slippery and most disputed term by propagating ideas about class struggle and subalternity. It was basically Gramsci, who coined this term. Gramsci remained unknown until Raymond Williams developed his theory after the translations of *The Modern Prince: And Other Writings* (1957) and *The Prison Notebooks* (1966). By 1982, Gramsci’s scholarship was widespread. “The ideology of subaltern historiography is derived from Gramsci who thinks of history in terms of multiple elements of conscious leadership.” (Gramsci, 1973:27)

In 1970s, the state-centred historical research became outdated and a new type of social historical work emerged “from below”. (Ludden: 2001: pg 3)

*The making of the English Working Class*(1964), by E.P Thompson focused on the subalterns at the bottom line who were previously ignored. Eric wolf’s 1982 history of lower class people is the first global history from below. During 1970s two new journals about South Asian peasants were initiated from UK and USA. The 1857 insurgency became a popular topic of debate in India .The stories of rebels like Kattabomman Nayakar were rediscovered.(Rajayyan:1974) Insurrection was studied and Indian home ministry feared revolution. The growing interest in subaltern studies along with its overlapping collaboration with feminism, gender studies, cultural and religious studies caused a resurrection of Gramsci in the late 20th and early 21st century.

The present research investigates the dynamism of the tricky term ‘Subaltern’ from Gramsci to
Spivak. Subaltern Studies is a branch of Post Colonialism so the research will focus on the binary opposites, the first one is colonial, west, powerful, supreme, white, often termed as Occident. The second one is East or Orient which is portrayed as Weak, submissive and coloured. The binaries are developed on the basis of concept of Other and Self which further enhances the categories like; civilized and uncivilized, educated and uneducated, superior and inferior, white and black, powerful and weak, subject and object and vice versa, which are the subject matter of Post Colonialism. Postcolonial studies may be defined as a critique to analyse these binaries. ‘Self’ is always given a prime importance and other is always shown as uncivilized, wild, bleak and weak. Post-Colonialism also discusses gender discrimination. Moreover, the impacts of colonialism on the colonized regions, in the period before colonialism, in the period during colonialism and after colonialism, are the trendy topics of the literature, which is written from the Post-Colonial perspective.

**Antonio Gramsci’s concept of Subaltern**

“Subaltern”, is the most modern cliché to signify a state of powerlessness, inferiority, and subordination in class, gender, caste, religion etc. It is a marginalized condition resulting from colonization or from certain other forms of economic, social, racial, religious or cultural dominance. The origin of this much discussed and disputed term can be excavated in the postulations of Italian communist social theorist Antonio Gramsci, in his investigations of Risorgimento published as “Notes on Italian History” later known as Prison Notebooks. Basically Gramscian concern for Subaltern was an integral part of his inquiry about Italian politics, history, culture, and the inter-relation between civil society and state. The term subaltern has been proliferated as an adjective and as a noun to signify the subordinates at margins and under hegemonic power structure. Gramsci’s conception of subaltern was not an obvious notion in the beginning, rather it evolved gradually. His method of analyzing “subaltern”, and to find out the evidences of certain tendencies, norms and patterns resembles Machiavelli. Gramsci’s preoccupation is to answer certain questions as how the subalterns came into existence, how did they survive especially at the margins, how did they succeed in attaining dominant positions? Gramsci’s choice of the term was infact an effort to evade the censorship of Benito Mussolini’s fascist regime. The subaltern was thus often used as a substitute for the word “proletariat”. Initially, the basic concern of Gramsci was capital-labour relations. The concept of subalternity that Gramsci has introduced may be applied to the group of people who are not given political power and autonomy.

Howson (2005) defines Gramscian concept of hegemony as a war of position. (Howson, 2005:129) This war of position is “Concentrated, difficult and requires exceptional qualities of patience and inventiveness”. (Gramsci 1971: 234, Q 13 &24) The ethico-political hegemony create exclusion and subalternity. Gramsci’s subaltern comprises people from different religions, cultures and
hierarchies, who are placed at the borders and are thus marginalized. According to Gramsci, hegemony often operated at the personal level, seeking to dominate certain social groups with power. Thus “conceptions of the world are restricted and limited by the grammar of the dominant group, creating exclusion and subalternity.” (Smith 2010:44) This fact tended to make Gramsci intensely interested in those social groups which were problematic for the mainstream dominant society. His emphasis on the collective subjectivity later became the founding stone of his work on subalternity.

Green (2002) in his seminal study on Gramsci, asserts that,

“The concept of subalternity is a contested and appropriated one, for some authors coming to be synonymous with either peasantry or the proletariat.” (Green: 2002)

Diverse cultural, political, social, religious and economic groups later came under the rubric of subaltern. According to Green,

“Gramsci was concerned with how literary representations of the subaltern reinforced the subaltern’s subordinated position……In historical and literary documents, the subaltern may be presented as humble, passive, or ignorant, but their actual lived experience may prove the contrary. Hence the integral historian has to analyze critically the way in which intellectuals represent the conditions and aspirations of the subaltern” (Green 2000: 15)

The traditional Marxist conception of marginality tended to demonize such social groups as ‘deviant’ and ‘lumpen proletariat’, the thrown up and refused class. These people were blamed to have a passive attitude towards changing their circumstances and having a preference to live at the margins. However, Gramsci made a positive contribution by pointing the intellectual errors by making wrong judgements about certain social organizations just by their appearances. He argued that the root cause of such situation must be discovered. Gramsci viewed subalternity as a position which can be overcome. In other words he preferred rational over non-rational. (Green: 2000: 46)

American academic Frank Wilderson (2003) terms Gramsci’s conception as of a white male worker. According to Wilderson, Gramiscian concern was primarily capital-labour relations and the resulting resistance. He asserts,

“exploitation (wage slavery) is the only category of oppression which concern Gramsci: society, western society, thrives on exploitation of the Gramscian subject.” (Wilderson 2003: 231)

The idea of resistance is also a central one in the theory of hegemony, which depends on human capacity and the choices available to such subaltern groups. Such type of resistance may be termed as a war of position, which sometimes results in uplifting the subalterns from a subordinate position to a dominant position. In fact, Gramsci directly links subalternity with his concept of hegemony, state and civil society, which results in an integral state.

Gramsci’s concept of subaltern evolved in his Prison Notebooks gradually. In his Notebook 1(1929-
30), he used this term for “the non-commissioned military troops, who are subordinate to the authority of lieutenants, colonels, and generals” (Gramsci, 1975:48-54) But at the end of his Notebook 1, Gramsci stated that “(Church) is no longer an ideological world power, but only subaltern force” (Gramsci, 1975,139) While discussing the unfinished works of Karl Marx, which were later edited by Engels, he used the word Subaltern figuratively to view Engels as a subaltern as compared to Marx. Engels lacks the theoretical scholarship of Marx and so he occupies a subaltern position.

**Subaltern Studies Group and Recent Development in Literary Theory**

Subaltern Studies emerged as a new career in England by the end of 1970s. At that time a group of Indian and English historians proposed to launch a new journal in India. Subaltern Studies group was basically a group of Marxist scholars who collaborated in early 1980s to analyze “subaltern” as a new field of study in modern Indian historiography. These scholars were greatly influenced by Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*. Ranajit Guha was the founding member and editor of this journal called *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. By the time of his retirement in 1989, Ranajit Guha and his eight collaborating scholars had written thirty-four essays in the six volumes of the *Subaltern Studies*.

David Ludden asserts in *A Brief History of Subalternity*, that by 1993 this group was truly established as “an assortment of marginalized academics”, and its international prestige inspired Latin American Subaltern Studies group. So the intellectual driving force of Ranajit Guha was the founding stone of South Asian Subaltern Studies. The seminal essays of 1988 by Guha and Spivak were published with a foreword by Edward Said. According to Burton Stein, 1980s were “a decade of historical efflorescence” especially in South Asian studies. (Ludden 2001,1)

Guha’s trajectory included two processes, intellectual and political. The Marxist study of peasants and workers, the experiences of oppression and resistance further led Guha towards Gramsci and communist politics. The radical activists and scholars were deeply inspired by the communists who were concerned for oppressed people. The term *Subaltern* greatly attracted Guha, because it offered a flexible interpretation of Indian complex social realities and oppression. In 1970-71 Guha encountered young Maoist militants and was deeply stuck by their idealism. In his 1983 study, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (2002) Guha made certain generalizations about the relation between colonialism and peasant protests.

Guha presented a substantially new picture of peasant’s insurgency quite contrary to previous picture of peasants as passive. He had sketched out a ‘subalternist’ perspective. The subaltern studies scholars argued that there were basically two domains of politics in colonial India, ‘elite’ and ‘subaltern’. Shahid Amin’s essay ‘Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-
2` uniquely analyzed the Gandhian nationalism and local subaltern insurgency. Subaltern Studies evolved gigantically, when placed in a widening horizon of scholarship. Its meanings had changed greatly since 1982, 1985, 1989, and 1993. Subaltern subjects had been reinvented and reincarnated desperately. In the beginning the writers focused on nationalism and insurgency. From a chaos of state power and social movements emerged an analytical study based on local and personal resistance against the elitist hegemonic power groups. The influence of Micheal Focault on these Subaltern scholars is also obvious. These writers mainly focused on Indian historiography from colonial to post colonial context. Guha redefined subalternity “as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society, whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or any other way”. (Laden 2001:2)

According the Subaltern Studies Collective comprising of Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, and Gyan Parkash religion played a vital role in “subaltern consciousness”. Religions encouraged “insurgency” contrary to acquiescence to the hegemonic control. So, the South Asian society presented a unique combination of religion especially Hinduism and Subalternity and it was the main concern of the Subaltern Studies Collective writers. These writers rediscovered the historiography of voiceless actors of South Asian history, the peasants, insurgents, women, and other people subjugated by the elitist colonialist discourses.

Ranajit Guha (2001) argued that

“Religiosity was, by all accounts central to [Santal] hool (rebellion). The notion of power which inspired it ..... [was] explicitly religious in character. It was not that power was a content wrapped up in a form external to it called religion....it is not possible to speak of insurgency in this case except as religious consciousness.”

Ranajit Guha amalgamated Marxist materialist historiography with Hinduism, which was practiced among Indian Hindu elitists and subaltern community. Guha, in his essay in the second volume of subaltern studies mentioned a hul, or “uprising”, in 1855-56, by a tribal group Santals, from North Eastern India. The Santals protested, that the land they cleared for farming was their property, on the other side were colonial administrators, who claimed the land ownership. The Santals rejected all economic grounds and attributed this uprising to divine call of their deity “hakur”.

Guha in his famous essay, “Dominance Without Hegemony and Its Historiography” (2001b) cites a low-caste Bengali, Bagdi Vaisnava woman, Chandra, who died due to abortion in 1849. Guha also discussed the svadesi movement and declared that “Hinduism” as a religion was coercive and exploitative. Moreover, according to Guha, religion pleaded as an expression of elitist hegemonic powers rather as subaltern agency.

**Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s perspective on Subalternity**

Gayatri Ghakravorty Spivak is a hyphenated- American, a third world woman and a Bengali exile.
Spivak calls herself a ‘practical deconstructionist feminist Marxist’. Gayatri Spivak’s famous article, “Can the Subaltern Speak”, heavily referenced by Derrida’s OfGrammatology, was first published under the title “Power and Desire” in 1988. This seminal essay was a meticulous attempt to deconstruct post-colonialism. This essay successfully analyses the subaltern studies’ s group researches. Spivak, like Gramsci is much concerned about the strengthening in the subaltern’s social positioning. Spivak highly relied on Derrida’s deconstruction in discussing the caste attitudes and discrimination towards the subalterns. Spivak’s seminal work is in fact a critique of the conception of Europe as a ‘Subject’. Moreover she has also focused on the works of Gilles Deleuze and Micheal Foucault. It is worth noticing that Guha and Spivak both relied heavily on the Prison Notebook by Gramsci. He criticizes Leninist intellectuals. Gramsci shows a great concern for role of intellectuals in subaltern’s political and cultural progress in hegemonic structures.

Spivak sets this essay in third world background, due to her intellectual yearning to discover individual, cultural and national identity. Spivak occupies a `dialogic` space of ` in-betweenness` in post colonial literary theory, defining the manner of Western cultural representation of other colonized cultures. What makes Spivak versatile is her commitment with deconstruction while subverting the binary oppositions of Subject/Object, Self/Other, Occident/Orient, Centre/Marginal, and majority/ minority. She questions her own subject position as an Indian Intellectual. Spivak may rightly be termed as a Post-modern feminist, who mainly involved in satidebate. Spivak unveiled the truths while using deconstruction.

Spivak opens up her discussion through the dialogue between two historical intellectuals Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, who discussed the sovereign subject ,the heterogeneous networks of power/desire/interest, and the discourse of society’s Other. Deleuze mentions worker`s struggle to blow up power. The worker`s struggle is directly linked with desire. But according to Spivak, Deleuze and Guattari`s conception of linking desire, subjectivity and power is ineffective. Foucault and Althusser claimed, that desire and interest are inter-linked. Power, according to Foucault produces positive impact on desire and knowledge. The concrete experience of the oppressed is disclosed by the intellectuals, who clearly diagnose the episteme.

Spivak strongly endorsed the subaltern studies project. Spivak focused on sexual and gender differences, she also analysed various forms of representation. Moreover, Spivak offered a profound critique of radical Western philosophical meta-narratives and subaltern history. She also reviewed the manner in which Western cultures investigated the other cultures. Foucault`s conception of power springs from his critique of Marxism. Foucault asserts,

“Power is exercised the way it is in order to maintain capitalist exploitation. They genuinely serve the cause of the proletariat by fighting in those places where they find themselves oppressed. Women,
Subaltern identity of transgender in Indian society

Subalternity and gender deeply correlate with each other. Transgender or hermaphrodite’s identity is beyond conventional gender structure. Mostly the transgender possess male physique and female behaviour which causes complexity, ridicule and conflicts. They face displacement and existential dilemma due to familial and societal neglect, and unacknowledged sexual identity. In South Asian societies, such conditions are much agonising and birth of a transgender is regarded as a curse for the entire family. Their very existence is denied and they are relegated to the margins. The subaltern debates are generally about female subjugation and patriarchal hegemonic structures, but no open debate covers the transgender and the humiliation they face in mainstream society. The society imprisons and chides Eunuchs and discards their psychological consciousness. The transgender are socially shunned and marginalised and titled as ‘Hijras’ or ‘Shikhandi’ in Indian society.

These transgenders face true challenges and subalternity. They are oppressed and mostly they lack representation and appropriation. These people mostly leave their families and spend their lives anonymously. Their individuality is crushed under the powerful hegemonic structures. They have no access to family, jobs, education, religion and careers. They face social isolation and meaningless existence. In South Asian some communities lived in well organised communities under gurus.

Indian lawyer Rajesh Talwar highlighted human rights abuse of transgenders in a book titled “The Third Sex Human Rights” (1999). He highlighted the non-availability of proper earning sources for the transgender community. They are cruelly treated in prisons, police stations, hospitals, immigration, public places and homes. Mostly these people earn their income by begging and performing at ceremonies. They usually dance and their happy faces disguise their internal dilemmas. Their rights have been recently acknowledged by Supreme Court of India as a third gender.

Dustie Spencer’s The Subaltern Kashmiri: Expolring Alternative Approaches in the Analysis of Succession (2013), truly explores the subaltern identities of the Kashmiris firstly under hegemonic Dogra rule and secondly under the Indian rule. The end of Colonial rule in 1947 was followed by another dark episode in the history of Kashmir the neo-colonialism. The Indian rule in Kashmir is just another extension of the Colonial rule. The Indian government including elitist power structures meddle in the internal affairs by rigging elections and by diverse hegemonic tactics as killings, torture, rape, use of pallet guns and countless other Human Rights abuses.

According to Cockell (2000) this collective persecution of Kashmiris resulted in creating a new sort
of identity that is ethno-nationalist subaltern identity. The Kashmiri subalterns forged this new identity as a reaction to hegemonic power structure’s endeavour to crush their identities. Spivak asserted that “there is no singular homogenous subaltern, rather there are groups in which subaltern can fit, albeit with the capability for mobility into other categories and with fluidity” (1988: 284).

**Textual Analysis**

This chapter will present the detailed analysis of Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* in the perspective of the theory of subalternity. The trajectory of subaltern will be traced out while keeping in view the porous borders of nationality, caste, race, gender and religion. Roy’s non-fiction, essays, public commentaries often take controversial positions on the topics of globalization, neo-imperialism and the ongoing conflict with Kashmir.

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy merges and amalgamates her energies as a fiction writer and as an activist. She shapes a rich narrative that is as complex and multivalent as the modern India. Roy exposes the small world of transgenders with bigger complications in desperate need of help.

Spivak’s theory of the subaltern is basically a part of a longer colonial history, especially of the left-wing, anti-colonial thought processes, that primarily focused to challenge the class-caste system in Indian society. Spivak produced a better response to the voices and unwritten histories of subaltern women.

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a complete satire aiming to attack the ways of a patriarch society. It is a hegemonic society, where marginalised people as transgenders beg for their place, women are raped and bound to seize their lips, thousands struggle to find their place in cities. Moreover, the lives of dalits and lower caste people are vulnerable. Racial and communal violence frequently occurs due to hate speeches and power politics. The government is blindly taking all political advantages from these events. The actual victims are the citizens. Roy always captures real events in her texts and fiction according to Roy is no less. The story takes us through the lanes between the graveyards to Valleys, forests, to protest field, and to demonstrations. Apart from a social reformer, Roy is famous for her wonderful use of words.

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a vivid and complex novel. It is a story of beauty and horror, life and death, tenderness and cruelty. Roy wrote this novel in the span of twenty years while deepening her roots in India. She is of the view that fiction takes its time. In an interview by Merete Pryds Helle aired on Louisiana Channel, she claimed that the language of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* was created after smashing the language of *The God of SmallThings*. Roy claimed that a novel of real ambition must invent its own language. Throughout her writings, Roy has firmly
established herself as the voice for the downtrodden left behinds, for the un-presented and unheard both in India and around the world. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness,* is the compelling example of what fiction can do at its best. The novel is epic in its scope, and is an effortless dive into the mind of its protagonist facing contradictions and complexities in a hostile unjust world.

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness,* is a novel of identity with revolting winds of change. Roy’s narrative is resonant of Shelley’s ‘West Wind’ a wind of change in old xenophobic society. The Indian Nationalist, narrow and superficial social grid promotes a lust to divide not a desire to unite. The people living in a country since 1947 have to show their identities in order to survive hegemonic social structures. There is a resounding disdain for human rights that is permeating every level of government there is a rising fascism in India.

Roy being an architect is extremely careful about the structure of the novel. She claimed to have created the novel like a city having lanes, by lanes and sometimes using background as the foreground and foreground as the background. She has conspicuously focused on minute details and most of the time minor characters become supremely important. The chaos of Indian society is presented realistically as the readers become a part of the novel. Roy herself admits that the chaos of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is planned, while handling the structural pattern meticulously. The novel embodies the historical background of Delhi after 1857 mutiny, ancient and modern, planned and unplanned, poor and rich, civilized and wild. Roy asserts that all cities have a form inscribing themselves against the contours of nature. She has planned the novel structure like a city. The narration moves forward and backward. It is a story of human resilience and determination. The incendiary borders in the novel create solidarity as opposed to alienation. Roy declares that she is an optimist. She gives a direction to directionless, a strength to marginalised subalterns, and a voice to the voiceless.

**The Borders of Class, Caste, Race and subalternity**

Border is defined as a space that indelibly impacts the bodies that make contact with it. It is a force of image and subject construction. Van Houtum defines that “borders are a ‘fabricated truth’”. The present research explicates how vastly disparate physical objects play a central role in the subaltern and marginalised entity’s struggles against aggressive state practices and policies. According to Spivak ‘Subalternity’ is a ‘deferential space’.

Ranajit Guha, one of the founding members of Subaltern Studies group, explicated class boarders. According to Guha the centrality of symbolic objects contributes in solidifying class divides. He is of the view that such boarders must be challenged in order to overthrow oppressive structures during political struggles. Guha further defines the term ‘subaltern’

“ as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian
While Spivak’s seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak” (1986) presents four levels of marginalization as: Colonizers, Elites, Regional elites, and common people. Thus Subalterns are those people who have nothing to do for the welfare and betterment of society. They are totally marginalized and out of the mainstream society.

Spivak(1995) suggested that it is impossible for others to recover the subaltern voice. On the other hand Loomba (1998) argued that the marginalized subaltern people can perfectly articulate themselves in multiple ways. Roy (2004) also argued that there is nothing which can be defined as voiceless. Roy herself admits that she is ‘genetically optimistic’. So the subaltern make their presence noticed even if they remain silenced as sometimes silence communicates more than articulated expressions. The binary relationships of dominance and subjugation further explain the subalternity. The borders in the novel create a new world by the end of the novel. The people who do not fit in the social hierarchal grid eventually create a new community. This solidarity of hearts is unconventional and unorthodox love which is not based on sexual love.

**The Borders of Religion and Subalternity**

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, speaks about religious discriminations, religious differences and the political domination. The 1969 Gujarat communal riots was the most deadly episode after 1947 partition. These riots caused hundreds of killings, injuries and the loss of property. The Hindu nationalist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was acting behind the riots. Then the Bhagalpur violence 1989 also caused massacre and riots. The most deadly 2002 Gujarat riots are portrayed in the novel.

Roy was intimately familiar with these riots which caused sweeping changes in Indian ideology. Roy depicts how the hegemonic power structure encourages assassinations of innocent people by hate mongering. The victims are named as accused and they are murdered in the name of law and religion. Muslims were ruthlessly murdered at Gujarat.

**The Borders of Gender and Subalternity**

Spivak’s argument about the gendered subalternity became the most groundbreaking foundation of her theoretical scholarship. Although her main argument was the abolition of *Sati* a kind of widow sacrifice in India, but it covered a huge spectrum of social injustices in the Indian society. It was regarded in Indian society as a case of ‘White men saving brown women from brown men’. (Spivak p.93)

But Katherine Mayo visited India and wrote that, “The ills of Indian society stem from the very essence of Hinduism and its traditions: principally the deplorable treatment of women and
Untouchables`. (Ross, Eleanor: 386) She further argued that brown women and lower castes are subalterns and subordinates. Stephen Morton considers Spivak’s stance as a justification of colonialism. So, imperialism was a civilising mission rescuing Indian women. (Morton:63)

**Conclusion**

The present research is conducted to highlight the trajectory of subaltern and its dynamism with special reference to Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The present research highlights the marginalization of women, poor, lower caste people, Kashmiris and transgenders along with the formation factors of subalternity like hegemony, politics and religion.

The research has focused mainly on Spivak’s revolutionary essay, *“Can the Subaltern Speak”* and followed a hybrid framework focusing on the definition of subalternity from Gramsci to Guha, Spivak, Chatterjee and Loomba. Subalterns are sidelined and marginalised by force and the current study investigated that how oppressors used hegemony as a tool to suppress poor. These powerful religious and political elites told them that their interests are important for them but, actually they used them for their own interests. The subalterns could never understand the power game and hegemonic policies of elites and their supporters. They just obeyed them and consider them as their well wishers and they rule over these downtrodden people.

The novel highlights Roy’s personal political stands based on her strong conception of personal is political. She has tried to cover every possible theme from queer politics to Gujarat’s 2002 riots, violent caste and religious lynching phenomenon to neo-liberalism, from Emergency to Narmada Bachao Andolan and what not. Roy boldly took the charge to unmask the political and social fault lines of the Indian society when there is an atmosphere of intolerance and Indian political elitists claim India to be democratic and secular. She conjures the story which is brutal but very similar to the reality.

Roy dedicates *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* to “The Unconsoled” and the prominent characters of the novel reflect her activism and empathy for the various threatened, non-empowered and unconsolated marginalized people in India, the poor, the transgender Hijras, low caste Hindus (Dalits), Muslims, Kashmiris, Communist activists, and Adivaris. The abuses suffered by her characters range from sidelining, rejection, and intimidation to occupation, dispossession, trauma, violence, imprisonment, torture and death. The novel is wonderfully polemical. Roy implants at its core a deep empathy for the richness of Humanity and the Biosphere that is being destroyed in the name of neo-liberal progress, whether the inhabitants, society and environment of the drowning Narmada River valley or the Adivasis in their jungle retreats being supplanted by mining and industry.

**References**


Ross, Eleanor. (2009-2010) *Innervate. Leading Undergraduate Work in English Studies*