

Ethical Telling and the Aesthetic Told: Ethical Narratology of Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

Fatemeh Pourjafari ¹

Ph.D. Candidate of English Literature, Department of English Language and Literature,
Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

Leila Baradaran Jamili (Corresponding Author) ²

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature,
Borujerd Branch, Islamic Azad University, Borujerd, Iran

DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.34785/J014.2022.281>

Article Type: Original Article

Page Numbers: 25-40

Received: 12 December 2020

Accepted: 21 November 2021

Abstract

The present study seeks to argue the ethical values of the narrative strategies in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, a post-postmodern novel by the Indian author Arundhati Roy. To carry out the research, the prominent features of James Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative and Charles Taylor's ethical philosophy are examined. By applying such interdisciplinary approaches, the researchers investigate the characters' ethical positions in their quest for "authenticity" and "recognition" by focusing on the novel's "ethics of the told" and "ethics of the telling." The study indicates the characters' attempt to reach full awareness of their in-depth inclinations and their quest to achieve an authentic self. Living in India's multicultural context, though suffering from non-/mis-recognition by others, Roy's major characters can become authentic, free, and fulfilled through seeing the world and its people out of pure love for collective goodness. Eventually, highlighting the aesthetic strategies and authorial creativity provides a horizon to comprehend the different outlooks towards the ethical values and commitments that circulate freely within the novel's narrative world.

Keywords

Ethics of the Told; Ethics of the Telling; Authenticity; Recognition; Rhetorical Narrative Theory; Ethical Philosophy.

1. Introduction

This article explores the ethical values embedded in the choice of specific narrative frameworks in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*³, as representative of the post-postmodern⁴ novel which "belies postmodern skepticism and indicates that stories do have meaning" (Dumitrescu 150). Merging the rhetorical narrative studies

¹ e.pourjafari@gmail.com

² lbjamili@yahoo.com

³ The novel will be referred to in parenthetical citations as TMUH

⁴ Although the era is described by different terms, such as metamodernism, digimodernism, and transmodernism, the term post-postmodernism is used in this study because it is both all-inclusive and self-evident.

with ethical criticism helps readers clarify fictional characters' double status as textually and morally accountable persons. In the absence of the metanarratives as the legacy of postmodern philosophers, and in an age of "after virtue" in Alasdair MacIntyre's term (2), any attempt at providing ethical frameworks for living in the contemporary pluralist and decentered world can be a worthwhile endeavor.

Arundhati Roy (b.1961) is a contemporary Indian novelist, political activist, and essayist who is most well-known in the literary world for her 1997 much-praised novel, *The God of Small Things*. Since then, she has written various articles on contemporary political and cultural issues, been giving lectures on social causes and human rights, and published her second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* in 2017, which was nominated as a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction in January 2018. Roy, in this novel, narrates the story of Delhi, from the cramped quarters and narrow streets to the new metropolis, ever growing anew. The story also goes beyond the city into the Valley of Kashmir and the forests of central India, among the Maoists' rebels and Kashmiri militants, ranging temporally from the 1990s to the present time, weaving together the life narratives of geographically distant characters, who have one thing in common: desire for 'Azadi', the Urdu word for freedom.

Roy is well-known both for her two novels and her involvement in politics, human rights, and environmental issues. In *The Greater Common Good*, Roy's 1999 non-fiction piece on Narmada dam project, she explains her commitment to activism and how she was compelled to "set aside [James] Joyce and [Vladimir] Nabokov, to postpone reading, Don DeLillo's big book and substitute it with reports on draining and irrigation, with journals and books and documentary films about dams and why they are built and what they do" (6). However, even in non-fiction, her treatment of the subject matter is artistic. Therefore, one cannot distinguish an exact moral, emotional, and artistic distinction between her fiction and non-fiction. She approves that fiction and non-fiction are just two "different techniques of story-telling" (Roy, *Ordinary* 13) and that a selflessly perceived truth is more valid than facts: "Good fiction is the truest thing that ever there was. Facts are not necessarily the only truths. Facts can be fiddled with by economists and bankers. There are other kinds of truth" (13). The ethical turn in the narrative studies on the one hand, and the rhetorical narratology, which emphasizes the construction and transition of ethical truth in literature on the other hand, are ways to study these "other kinds of truth" that Roy speaks of.

Within the context of narratology, James Phelan is a prominent present-day figure in the rhetorical model of narrative theory. He establishes his theory on the basic principle that authors try to affect their audience through their texts in particular ways.

Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative stems from a basic definition for narrative as "somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened" (Phelan, "Rhetoric/Ethics" 287). Phelan elaborates on the significance of this assumption by referring to the attention it gives to the relations among tellers, audiences, and what has happened. The emphasis on the purpose of the narrative includes "a recognition that narrative communication is a multi-layered event, one in which tellers seek to engage and influence their audiences' cognition, emotions, and values" (287). This leads further to the idea that every narrative pictures certain characters whose mutual interactions through events have an ethical dimension.

Considering the ethics of narrative, at the conclusion of his *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Charles Taylor declares the aim of the work as "one of retrieval, an attempt to uncover buried goods through rearticulation and thereby to make these sources again empower, to bring the air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit" (520). According to Taylor, people in the contemporary world have lost the capacity to articulate who and what they are. The man of our time is a "disengaged self" (498), suffering from ethical vertigo, displaced from any "moral horizon" (104), and unable to articulate any substantive sense of the good. Recovery out of this malaise requires the realization of an identity which "is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which [one] can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what [one] endorse[s] or oppose[s]" (*Ethics* 27). Only then can one reacquire a sense of one's identity.

Reading *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* concerning ethics and narrative strategies will make it possible to identify the different features which contribute to the readers' judgment. After a review of the literature, the theoretical framework of the research is elaborated, followed by the discussion of the work, which is made through two main sections, ethics of the telling and the told. The tie between ethics and narrative strategies is highlighted all through the analysis of the novel.

2. Literature Review

Most of the studies on Arundhati Roy are concerned with postcolonial concepts, such as hybridity, ethnicity, and subaltern. However, few exceptions investigate her novel as representing the millennial sensibility and work that possesses the potential of readings other than postmodern and postcolonial. Raoul Eshelman in *Performatism or the End of Postmodernism* (2008) defines the new epoch as the replacement of endless irony with aesthetically imposed belief. He calls this new cultural dominant

'performatism.' In the second chapter, he maintains how performatism works in a selection of narratives by different authors among them Roy, and asserts that Roy's performative strategy is to "produce narrative closure in double frames and ensure obligatory reader identification with the subjects entrapped in those frames" (39).

Emilienne Baneth–Nouailhetas in "Committed Writing, Committed Writer?" proposes that Roy's work is "a re-centering on the individual and on a subjective, small-scale time, as opposed to the 'bigness' of history" (97). Roy's commitment is thus shown to depict the "small" things in the realm of everyday human life within the story's world. She further argues that for Roy the recentralization of the marginalized characters lends a rhetorical unity to her writings (98); and thus, the subject matter affects the style of her work. "Romancing the Other: Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*" (2019) is an article by Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes which discusses the motif of outsiders in Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Lau and Mendes claim that Roy's attitude is not to highlight postcolonial othering of the outsiders, but romancing them. They argue that Roy is very concerned with emotions and affect — matters of the heart — amid her depictions of bigotry, brutality, and blatant disregard of humanity. She insistently depicts joy in the "saddest places" (5).

Elizabeth S. Anker has specified a chapter of her *Fictions of Dignity: Embodying Human Rights in World Literature* (2012) to Roy's fiction and suggests how an embodied politics of reading novel can revive a vital fleshiness to the abstract subject of human rights. In this chapter, entitled "Return to the Things Themselves: Phenomenology and the Challenge of Justice," the author demonstrates Roy's involvement with the abuse of human rights, widespread in contemporary India. Referring to a "deeply ecological conception of social justice" in the novel, she explains that Roy's fiction "depicts human welfare as inexorably embedded within and therefore reliant upon both natural and animal being" (212). As the emotional lives of her characters are affected by the demolition of their natural environment, she overtly blames globalization "for defiling the natural environment," which is figured as "part and parcel of global modernity's other wrongs, including its many assaults upon human rights" (213). Roy's grim assessment of globalization is recognizable in her illustration of the many miscarriages of justice within a human-centered world, which destroys the ecological system's symmetries.

Meghan Gorman-DaRif's "Post-Magic: The Female Naxalite at 50 in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom*" (2018) is an article which suggests a new reading of the novel by focusing on the story of Revathy, a member of the militant wing of the Communist Party of India. By coining the term "post-magic", the author explains how "the magical ascriptions of agency and

empowerment to armed female fighters" (299) which contained "wonder, surprise, and hope" (302) have given their place to a new image in which the rebel female has no hope for a revolution. "The choice of the manner of one's death" (299) is the only thing she can do.

Filippo Menozzi offers a different reading of the work by highlighting its complex engagement with the issue of Realism. In his "Too Much Blood for Good Literature: Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and the Question of Realism" (2019), he argues that Roy's novel "does not reject realism, but reframes it as a digressive, fighting realism of contradiction, protest and denunciation, unsettling the space of literature with antagonism" (32). Hence, Roy's modified form of Realism can be considered as "repository of experiences at odds with hegemonic ways of living" (32) in the twenty-first century pluralistic world.

3. Theoretical Framework: Ethical Narratology

The present study applies an interdisciplinary approach, which integrates perspectives from two fields of knowledge in humanities: narrative studies and ethical philosophy. On this account, the investigation relies primarily on James Phelan's narrative theory and Charles Taylor's philosophy of ethics. In his "Rhetorics, Ethics, and Narrative Communication," Phelan claims that in his rhetorical approach to ethics, he does not attribute certain features to distinguish the language of literary works from ordinary language but prefers to make three initial commitments and then establishes his argumentation of the ethical dimension of literary works on this basis. The first is that literature is more than a rich linguistic medium: "Instead, rhetorical literary ethics regards literature as a communicative event, a rhetorical action in which an author addresses an audience for some purpose(s)" (56). The key idea of the first commitment, therefore, will be that the potential power of the narrative does not rely on any particular feature of the work such as characters, events, or structure, because these elements are instruments in the hand of the author to accomplish his/her goal which is communication.

The second initial commitment concerns the subject of literary communication: "Even anti-mimetic works have thematic or other purposes that seek to shed light on our ways of being in or interacting with our world" (56). From these two commitments, one may conclude that the ethical dimension of literary communication has got two sides: the ethics of the telling "stemming from how the author relates to her audience through the deployment of the various means at her disposal" and the ethics of the told, "stemming from the ethical dimensions of what is represented through those means" (56). The third commitment is methodological. Phelan believes that the

rhetorical view to ethics deals with the ethical aspects of the literary work by studying it from the inside out rather than from the outside in. This means that “it looks for the ethical values implicit in this kind of telling, about this kind of incident, rather than identifying one or more ethical systems as especially adaptable for the ethics of all or even most literary communication” (57). The present research relies on Taylor’s ethical philosophy to carry out this ethical evaluation.

Taylor believes that the human agency in the present world is constituted by moral affirmation. In this regard, he defines the human agent in the light of moral issues in a way that “selfhood and morality turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes” (*Sources* 3). As the main characteristic of the human agent, Taylor’s ethical philosophy focuses on the person’s constant quest for significance, which is “the respect for the life, integrity, and the well-being, even flourishing, of others” (4). This quest entails the human agent with a sense of inwardness and depth.

Taylor proposes a retrieval of the ideal of authenticity because he believes that the interpretation of authenticity as a moral ideal, an ideal geared toward “self-realization” (481), is a way out of the malaise of modernity caused by the stifling of our powerful moral sources and authentic self-understanding. In his book *Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor describes that the ideal of authenticity encourages the human agent to arrive at a deeper self-understanding and self-fulfillment (25). Taylor strongly argues against the characterization of the self as “primarily a subject of representations” (“Dialogical” 307). In contrast, he portrays the self as engaged in dialogical action. This is the dialogical interpretation of authenticity, which means that one can only be authentic in contact with other people. As “individuals must form and reform their senses of self-authenticity by ways of dialogue, exchange, and interaction with differences” (Esmkhani et al. 147), Taylor emphasizes the importance of the concept of webs of interlocution: “A self exists only within what I call ‘webs of interlocution’” (*Sources* 36).

As the theory of narrative ethics is mainly featured by this advantage that it does not analyze either form or content of the narratives and deals with a combination of both, the researchers have organized the essential framework of the analysis into two major parts. The first section contends with Phelan’s ethics of the told while the second section discusses the other dimension of ethical communication, which is ethics of the telling. Furthermore, Taylor’s ethical philosophy will be taken into consideration for the ethical evaluations about the characters’ decisions and actions.

4. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*: Ethics of the Told

In *Experiencing Fiction*, Phelan explains that “individual narratives explicitly or more often implicitly establish their ethical standards in order to guide their audiences to particular ethical judgments” (10). He then elaborates on the ethical positions of the told and the telling. Ethics of the told revolve around the characters’ choices and interactions, the ethical dimensions of the way the characters choose to act in different situations, and how a narrative’s progression shows its stance towards its characters’ ethical issues.

In order to study *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by its ethics of the told, the characters, their relationship with each other, and the value of their actions and decisions are investigated to reconstruct the ethical realm of the novel, which will be evaluated by relying on Taylor’s philosophical principles on ethical issues. The ethics of authenticity is taken from Taylor and applied to the characters’ behaviors, judgments, and ethical choices to recognize the ways the characters articulate their authentic self. Moreover, a part is also specified to investigate the characters’ struggle to gain recognition from their significant others. To do so, each has to acquire a particular language of expression and specific horizons of significance that give meaning to his/her life and actions.

4.1. Articulation of Authenticity through the Emplotment of Events

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is indeed the story of the multiple characters systematically thrown into the margins. Indeed, Roy as the implied author, through her peculiar emplotment of the events, demonstrates how these unheard voices and unseen men and women manage to attain a creative agency, within the same system, by the alternative life they choose, believe in, and eventually run. The life narrative of Anjum, the transgender protagonist of the novel, is such an instance.

Anjum’s life narrative begins with Jahanara Begum’s dilemma as an orthodox Muslim Indian woman who has given birth to a child with physical confusion in her sexual organs. She finds herself incapable of defining the baby in language because identity for her is defined by language: “was it possible to live outside language?” (*TMUH*10), she asks herself; a question that exhibits the necessary power of language in generating identity. Taylor, in his “Self-interpreting Animals”, writes that “through the language we have come to accept, we have a certain conception of the imports that impinge on us. This conception helps constitute our experience; it plays an essential role in making us what we are” (72). Anjum, as a transgender, does not possess a classifiable identity within the pre-existing, socially transmitted, horizons of significance underlying the Indian Muslim community and lives ‘outside language.’

However, Anjum does not let her identity be confined within pre-existing linguistic codes. She chooses to be a creative agent who makes meaning in her life by drawing certain features from the rigid definitions established in the cultural value system of the society she lives in and creates her own design of an authentic agent. In the first chapter of the novel, “a man who knows English” (TMUH4) tells Anjum that her name written backward in English becomes Majnu, the lover of the story of Laila and Majnun, reminding one of the English Romeo and Juliet. When later, he corrects his mistake and claims that her name spelled backward will be Mujna, “which was not a name and meant nothing at all” (4), Anjum answers: “It doesn’t matter. I’m all of them. [...] Who says my name is Anjum? I’m not Anjum, I’m Anjuman. I’m a *mehfil*, I’m a gathering of everybody and nobody, of everything and nothing” (4). Being ‘outside language’ in this novel endows one with increased agency and authentic creativity, free from the society’s horizons of significance.

Brian Holmes attributes a set of positive features to the precariousness, such as “spontaneity, creativity, cooperativity, mobility, peer relations, appreciation of difference, and openness to present experience” (qtd. in Ferreri and Dawson 428), which is observable in Roy’s characterization of Anjum and her choices to find a life to which she belongs. The non-conformism to the dominant value-system enables her to be open to “risk, opportunity, creative agency and authentic action” (Lawn 1034). She chooses an alternative way, and by giving priority to certain facets of her identity, she succeeds in articulating her authentic selfhood. She follows Bombay Silk till she reaches the gates of Khwabgah – the House of Dreams – where a community of diverse transgenders has taken shelter, and after a time, permanently moved to it. Anjum moves away from the reassurance of domesticity of her parents’ home “where his family had lived for centuries” (TMUH25) to gain and later protect the authenticity of her selfhood. Thus, she fulfills the second feature that, according to Taylor, makes identity: belonging to a community.

4.2. The Urgency to an Engaged Agency: Collective Survival and Recognition of Other

The significance of articulating one’s authentic self is only one aspect of the formation of identity. All human beings, according to Taylor, define themselves in ‘webs of interlocution,’ which means that self-discovery never happens in isolation but by negotiation, respect, and acceptance of other people. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* illustrates this recognition and non-recognition, and the consequent outcomes, through characters’ interactions and struggles in the social context. The transgenders, lower-caste Dalits, religious minorities, orphans, addicts, anti-government political activists, and other casualties of the Indian society are gathered

in this novel, and each has his/her narrative while the life narratives of all intermingle in one way or another.

Tilo, the girl whose narrative forms chapters seven to nine of the novel and has the story of Kashmir's struggle for independence at its heart, is one of the marginalized characters who tries to achieve happiness in her life by taking strength from the power of interconnectedness and romantic love. By focusing on Tilo-Musa romance, Roy pictures their desire and attempt to create new spaces for themselves, as they both belong to nowhere in the beginning. They do not submit to the mainstream framework and try possible new lives by choosing to perform new roles in their lives; one is encouraged by the innocent death of his beloved wife and daughter and the other by her love for the former.

Musa's cause is to fight against the non-recognition of a nation and bring them back an identity taken away from them. Kashmir is described as a place where the people are not recognized by their personality, rather by their ID card; as Musa describes, "our cards are more important than we ourselves are now. That card is the most valuable thing anyone can have" (343). In Taylor's worldview, strong evaluations motivate one's personal and collective life by creating meaningful selfhood. Moreover, as human beings are always socially embedded and inescapably engaged in social practices, the more one's strong values orient towards the shared relations and meaningful intersubjective spaces (Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* 230), the worthier his/her life will be. Along with the suggestion he has received from the Indian forces to collect information for them on the one hand and retreating into the security of his home, on the other hand, he chooses a third way which is to fight for the whole Kashmiri people, a community of individuals who live within "the rifle-sights of a soldier" (*TMUH* 347). He chooses to defend the lives of Kashmiri men and women for whom even their houses and balconies are unsafe, and this choice changes his life from a reserved, adventureless one to that of a freedom fighter for whom the shared happiness has priority.

This change is even more evident in Tilo's life after becoming involved in a deeply emotional relationship with Musa. The indifferent girl for whom the others were always unimportant gradually changes into an 'engaged agent' – to use Taylor's terminology – who freely roams the conflicted regions and enthusiastically connects with the marginalized castaways to experience "the joy in the saddest places, and the unexpectedness of things" (Macwan 283). She becomes a binding force between various outcasts, diverse individuals, and their communities and, through her growing sensitivity towards all human beings (whom she was not aware of before), contributes to reconstructing the world anew, based on respect, empathy, and love.

5. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*: Ethics of the Telling

Ethics of the telling considers text -internal issues such as the ethical dimensions of the narrative techniques and the significance of the relation between implied author and the story world. Phelan and Rabinowitz clarify what ethical relationships are at work in ethics of the telling in their "Twain, Huck, Jim, and US: The Ethics of Progression in Huckleberry Finn":

(1) Most generally, the implied author's relationship to the authorial audience with respect to the larger narrative progression – the trajectory and design of the global narrative act.

(2) More specifically, the relationship of the implied author to the authorial audience with respect to a general strategy of telling (choice of one kind of narrator rather than another, choice of communication through dialogue rather than narration, and so on), to the execution of that strategy in local acts of telling, and to what is told in those acts. (156)

While the ethics of the told involves characters, their relation and speech, and the ethical issues engender from them, the ethics of the telling deals with the way of the treatment of the events, point of view, and narrative techniques.

The analysis of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by its ethics of telling is to investigate Roy's narrative strategies and their ethical significance. The shift from the third person omniscient to the first-person narrator in chapters seven and eleven will be investigated to find out the ethical significance behind it. Furthermore, Roy indicates the emotional and moral shattering of the Indian society not only through the omniscient narrators' voice but also through fragments of characters' personal writings, songs and photos. The final aim is to reconstruct the ethical principles of this literary narrative by investigating the implied author's specific textual signals.

5.1. Thus Spoke Landlord: Character Narration as Ethical Strategy

Chapters seven and eleven of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, both entitled "The Landlord," are narrated through one of the characters, Biplab (whom Tilo calls Garson Hobart in the story), while shifting the narration from the third person to the first person. By this shift in the narrator, the events of the story move from Delhi to Kashmir. As he is a member of the Indian Intelligence Bureau, the tensions between the Indian government and the Kashmir region – an area contended by India and Pakistan after partition – are described through his eyes. These two long chapters serve the implied author's political comments on conflicts in India, a country where "normality is like a boiled egg: its humdrum surface conceals at its heart a yolk of egregious violence" (*TMUH* 150), and where people "live together, tolerate each other and, from time to time, murder one another" (151).

One significant issue, considering ethics of the telling, can be to investigate the implied author's objective for the shift from the third person to the first-person narrator. *Living to Tell about It* is the book in which Phelan dwells upon 'character narration' in details. In defining the term, he asserts that "character narration, it will surprise no one to hear, is an art of indirect communication: an author communicates to her audience by means of the character narrator's communication to a narratee" (1). Further, he describes that the character narrator has two kinds of narrative communication, namely the author-authorial audience and the narrator-narratee, the first being realized through the second. In the same way, there are two narrative purposes as well, the author's purpose and the character narrator's purpose; the first often entails the second.

By Garson Hobart's narration, the author of the novel presents the perspective of the position of power towards India's insurgencies, rather than narrating the events through the eyes of the third person non-character narrator. Hobart seems to represent the typical Hindu nationalist – a part of the hegemony discourse – who criticizes "those grumbling intellectuals and professional dissenters who constantly carp about this great country" (*TMUH* 147). However, in the previous chapters, the authorial audience is provided by the social, cultural, and political reality of life in India through narratives of the everyday life of such characters as Anjum, Saddam the Dalit, Dr. Azad Bhartiya, the fasting protester against corruption in India and many others in Jantar Mantar with banners which say:

The Story of Kashmir

DEAD = 68,000

DISAPPEARED = 10,000

Is this Democracy or Dream Crazy? (115)

India, as portrayed through the focalization of the margins, is – in Anjum's words – a "place of falling people" where "there is no *haqeeqat* [truth]" and people "are not real" for "they don't really exist" (84), while the first-person narrator, who holds a strong position in power calls it a "corner of paradise": "The shops and markets sell food and flowers and clothes and mobile phones, no grenades, and machine guns. Children play at ringing doorbells, not at being suicide bombers. We have our troubles, our terrible moments, yes, but these are only aberrations" (147). As Deputy Station Head of Intelligence, Hobart describes the protest-ridden India through the peaceful residential street outside his apartment and exhibits the situation as though all the injustices and troubles are normal and insignificant. The close reading of this extract emphasizes Roy's skillful application of the character narration as an "art of indirection" (Phelan,

Living 7), by which she communicates her perspective of India and the dynamics between the State and the margins to her authorial audience while restricting herself to the eyes and mind of the character narrator – Garson Hobart – as he addresses his narratees.

5.2. ‘Disjecta Membra’: Shattered Narratives, Shattered Worlds

Another significant issue to consider while studying the ethics of the telling in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is to demonstrate how the structure of the narrative mirrors the chaos and ‘disjecta membra’ or shattering narratives surrounding the characters in India’s fragmented world by consisting of newspaper reports, diaries, songs, letters, mythological stories, epitaphs, and testimonies. India is, according to Roy, as fragmented as the characters of her novel, the many varied voices among whom the experience of loss, injustice, and inequality is familiar. Communists are one of these suppressed voices, among other singular localities, and political and religious marginalities in India, to whom Roy attends and attempts to illustrate their sufferings ethically and politically. They are the communists, the native inhabitants of Central India, who “face displacement, institutionalized segregation, and state terrorism” (*TMUH*498); and consequently, they begin their fight against the Indian government to gain their civil rights and the ownership of their own lands. This fight is known as the Maoist movement, declared by the Indian officials as ‘terrorists’ for they aim their fight against the corrupt system of contemporary India.

The implied author’s method to consider the narrative of this group of margins is to use the varied narrative technique of letter writing. The letter to which a whole chapter is given is written by the Maoist activist Revathy to the unknown protector of her child, Miss Jebeen the Second. In this letter, Revathy unfolds horrifying stories about herself and her comrades in the forests of Central India. She describes how she was tortured physically and then raped many times by six men of the Indian army in the forest, the result of which was the birth of Miss Jebeen. Giving voice to the victimized communists in this novel is made possible through a long-detailed letter. Gerard Genette proposes that incorporation of letter-writing characters in the novel is a kind of internal focalization explaining that “the very principle of this narrative mode implies in all strictness that the focal character never be described or even referred to from the outside and that his thoughts or perceptions never be analyzed objectively by the narrator” (192). In her letter, Revathy reveals the brutal face of the authority on the one side and the brotherhood of all various groups who fight against this common inhumane enemy on the other side: “In the forest, everyday police is burning [*sic*] killing and raping poor people. Outside there are you, people, to fight and take up

issues. But inside, there is us only. So I am returned to Dandakaranya to live and die by my gun" (*TMUH*427).

Rather than presenting a unified response to the Indian situation, Roy depicts the reality of the shattering social context in India through 'disjecta membra,' and various fractures of information through diaries and letters. The fragmented characters are allowed to narrate a "shattered story," and they do this by "slowly becoming everything" (436). Through her narrative techniques, or what Phelan calls ethics of the telling, Roy redefines the cults, questions the cultural conventions, brings the agent of authority into the scene to talk, and pushes the margins from the periphery to the center.

6. Conclusion

In this article, Roy as a representative of the post-postmodern literature and a distinguished literary figure of the twenty-first century is studied through construing her novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The analysis is carried out by using Phelan's ethics of the told and the telling, besides Taylor's ethics of authenticity and the need for recognition. The final goal is to show how Roy employs various narrative techniques to communicate her ethical stand through reconstruction and evaluation of those values. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is the narration of the marginalized outcasts who possess creative powers to overcome the challenges of life. They are "seekers," in Taylorian terms, who redefine and rearticulate themselves constantly through an ethically dynamic process. They are in fact, aware that human identity is dialogical; and selfhood is defined only in the frames of reciprocal relations with others. Here again, the ethically oriented Roy makes use of different methodologies to approach these specific ethical issues. Two chapters of her work are narrated by an Indian Intelligence Agent, and therefore, the power's voice. This shift from the third person to the first-person narrator makes space for the readers' insight into the other side of events in Kashmir, namely the side of the power. Moreover, India's shattering reality is enhanced through the insertion of newspaper clippings, diaries, songs, and letters into the work. That is how the narrative structure reflects the chaos and fragmentation in which characters live.

As a twenty-first-century novelist, Roy is not driven by the same ontological questions that involved the 70s or 80s authors, and her novel marks a transition from the postmodern fragmented and self-referential narratives that mocked the existence of any grand narrative to a world in which stories still do have meanings. Postmodernist multiplication of meaning and ethical indifference has given its place to the ethical issues in her work, distinguished by a re-engagement with realistic modes

of representation and the associated ethical values such as interconnectedness and integration. Her novel, it can be concluded, uses various narrative techniques to communicate the ethical values to the readers, which correspond to the post-postmodern need for integrity, recognition, and tolerance rather than fragmentation and indifference.



References

- Anker, Elizabeth S. *Fictions of Dignity: Embodying Human Rights in World Literature*. London: Cornell UP, 2012.
- Baneth-Nouailhetas, Emilienne. "Committed Writing, Committed Writer?" *Globalizing Dissent: Essays on Arundhati Roy*. London: Routledge, 2008. pp. 93-104.
- Dumitrescu, Alexandra. "Intimations of Metamodernism: Innocence and Experience in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*." *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women's Writing*. Edited by Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010. pp. 149-66.
- Eshelman, Raoul. *Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism*. New York: The Davies Group Publishers, 2008.
- Esmkhani Yuvalari, Farnaz, et al. "Globalization of Local Lives: Performing Self-Authenticity as Personal, Local and Social Process in Zadie Smith's NW." *Critical Literary Studies*, vol. 3, no.1, 2021, pp. 141-156. DOI: 10.34785/J014.2021.779
- Ferreri, Maria, and Gloria Dawson. "Self-Precarization and the Spatial Imaginaries of Property Guardianship." *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2018, pp. 425-440.
- Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. New York: Cornell UP, 1980.
- Gorman-DaRif, Meghan. "Post-Magic: The Female Naxalite at 50 in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom*." *South Asian Review*, vol. 39, no.3-4, 2018, pp. 298-310.
- Lau, Lisa, and Ana Cristina Mendes. "Romancing the Other: Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Jan. 2019, pp. 1-16. DOI: 10.1177/0021989418820701
- Lawn, Jennifer. "Precarity: A Short Literary History, from Colonial Slum to Cosmopolitan Precariat." *Interventions*, vol. 19, no. 7, 2017, pp. 1026-40.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*. London: Duckworth, 1985.
- Macwan, Sunil S. *Literary Cosmopolitanisms of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and Arundhati Roy*. Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 2018.
- Menozzi, Filippo. "Too Much Blood for Good Literature: Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and the Question of Realism." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 55, no.1, 2019, pp. 20-33.

- Phelan, James. *Experiencing Fiction: Judgment, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2007.
- . *Living to Tell About It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2007.
- . "Rhetoric/Ethics." *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Edited by David Herman. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 2007. 287-306.
- . "Rhetorics, Ethics, and Narrative Communication." *Soundings*, vol. 94, no.1-2, 2011, pp. 55-75.
- Phelan, James, and Peter J. Rabinowitz. "Twain, Huck, Jim, and US: The Ethics of Progression in Huckleberry Finn." In *Narrative Ethics*. Edited by Jakob Lothe and Jeremy Hawthorn. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013, pp. 153-166.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The Greater Common Good*. Bombay: India Book Distributors, 1999.
- . *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. London: Penguin Random House: 2017.
- . *The Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*. Cambridge: South End Press, 2004.
- Taylor, Charles. *Ethics of Authenticity*. Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1991.
- . *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.
- . "Self-interpreting Animals." In *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I*. Charles Taylor. New York: Cambridge UP, 1985, pp. 45-77.
- . *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989.
- . "The Dialogical Self." In *The Interpretive Turn: Philosophy, Science, Culture*. Edited by David R Hiley, et al. Ithaca: Cornell UP: 1991, pp. 304-14.