

**A SPATIAL READING OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS***

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**Abstract**

*The research paper aims to describe how the graveyard is used as a space of resistance for marginalized people in Arundhati Roy's novel The Ministry of Utmmost Happiness. Additionally, the study explores how the graveyard in the novel empowers people who are excluded from mainstream society. The analysis also discusses how it shapes our understanding of space and place. The study is qualitative in nature as some extracts from the novel are selected for in-depth analysis on the graveyard as a symbol of resistance for marginalized people in contemporary India. It is argued that using the graveyard as a space of resistance, highlight issues of caste, gender, and class-based discrimination in contemporary India. Even unlikely places can be sites of resistance and empowerment. The paper ends with the suggestion that the marginalized people often take shelter in lonely places in order to protect themselves and show resistance. Future research can probe into how the places like graveyard can provide peace, care and welfare for those who are treated others. Spatial Analysis can be explored in other genres of literature e. g. drama, poetry, and short stories. It is important to know how some specific place affects the characters' identities. The study underscores the relevance of this concept in the present era.*

**Keywords** Aroundhati Roy, *The Ministry of Utmmost Happiness*, Spatial Analysis, The marginalized communities, Resistance and empowerment, Class, Caste, Gender, The graveyard.

**Introduction**

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmmost Happiness* is a rich and complex novel that explores issues of identity, displacement, and social inequality. The novel has been widely acclaimed for its political commentary and its portrayal of marginalized communities in India. However, one aspect of the novel that has received limited attention in scholarship is the concept of the graveyard as a space of resistance.

The theme of marginalization is explored and interlinked with space and place. One of the central ideas in the novel is the use of graveyard as a space of resistance for the marginalized. In the novel, the graveyard becomes a refuge and sanctuary for those who are excluded and ostracized from Indian society. But while analyzing the spatial deictic features in the novel, the study will analyze how Roy uses the graveyard as a space to challenge dominant power structures and offers a space of agency for the ignored segments of Indian society. The novel emphasizes the importance of reclaiming and redefining space in the face of oppression. The spatial reading of the novel will focus on the significance of memory and history in shaping readers' understanding of

space. The graveyard as space of resistance is a political act. It becomes a powerful means of honoring and remembering those who have been silenced.

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* explores the concept of liminal spaces, or spaces that are in-between and outside of the mainstream society. The graveyard challenges the binary of life and death and the social norms that come with it. Anjum, a hijra (transgender) character, creates a home for herself and other hijras in the graveyard. Anjum sets up her own Jannat (heaven) guesthouse on a small piece of land in a graveyard where her family is buried. Jannat guesthouse becomes home to some other odd balls, a baby picked up from trash, an almost blind untouchable man, an animal lover raised by hijras, a music teacher, a molvi and Tilo. Musa, a Dalit character, seeks shelter there after being falsely accused of terrorism. The graveyard is also significant for Kashmiris and women in the novel, serving as a space of mourning, hiding, and planning away from oppressive power structures.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is important because it looks at how the graveyard is used as a space of resistance for marginalized people in Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The study uses a special kind of analysis to understand how the graveyard helps people who are left out of society. The study also talks about and discusses how the graveyard affects the characters' sense of self and how it shows problems like caste, gender, and class-based discrimination. This study's findings could be important for using literature to fight against unfairness and could inspire more research on how space and place can help people who are treated unfairly.

### **Statement of Problem**

While there has been considerable scholarly attention on Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, there is a notable research gap in exploring the concept of the graveyard as a space of resistance for the marginalized. While some literary analyses have touched upon the symbolism of the graveyard in the novel, few studies have undertaken a comprehensive spatial deictic analysis to unpack the ways in which this space functions as a site of resistance and agency. Furthermore, there has been limited research on the impact of the graveyard as a space of resistance on the characters' individual and collective identities and its larger implications for societal issues of discrimination.

### **Objectives of Study**

What follows are the major objectives of the study:

- i. To figure out how the graveyard works as a space of resistance for the marginalized.
- ii. To investigate how the graveyard as a space of resistance affects the characters' identities in the novel, both as individuals and as a group.

### **Research Question**

How does the graveyard function as a space of resistance for marginalized communities in Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*?

### **Literature Review**

#### **i. Deixis and its types**

Deixis is an important aspect of language that allows speakers to refer to elements of the context in which a conversation is taking place. As Leech (1983) notes, deixis is an emotional tool for achieving successful communication because it helps speakers establish reference points for the

people, places, and objects being discussed. There are different types of deixis, temporal deixis, and spatial deixis, as defined by Lyons (1977), refers to deixis that establishes reference to the speaker and the hearer, such as pronouns like “I,” “you,” “we,” and “they.” Temporal deixis, on the other hand, refers to deixis that establishes reference to time, such as adverbs like “now,” “then,” “today,” and “yesterday,” as well as tense markers like “will” and “did” (Fillmore et al., 2012). Finally, spatial deixis established reference to space and location, such as adverbs like “here,” “there,” “near,” and “far,” and demonstratives like “this” and “that” (Levinson, 1983). By understanding the different types of deixis, speakers can use language to create shared meaning and effectively communicate with one another.

## **ii. Previous studies on graveyard as a spatial deixis**

Researchers like Shields (2015) and Rüpke (2007) have maintained that cemeteries have historically been sites of resistance and have played significant roles in cultural and political movements. From the African Burial Ground in New York City to the Roman cemetery as a site of cultural memory, the cemetery has been used as a space of resistance against dominant power structures.

El-Zein's (2014) study examines the importance of cemeteries/graveyards as spaces of memory and resistance in the Arab world. She argues that cemeteries provide a physical space for communities to commemorate their dead and resist oppressive power structures. She discusses how cemeteries have been used as sites of resistance by the Palestinian community, where they serve as a symbol of resistance against Israeli occupation. She also notes how cemeteries in Egypt have been used as spaces for political activism and commemoration of those killed during political uprisings.

Johnson's (2013) study has explored the role of music and space in shaping resistance movements in Los Angeles. The spaces like cemeteries can serve as sites of resistance and solidarity-building for marginalized communities. The study reveals how African American communities in Los Angeles have used cemeteries as sites of protest against police brutality and as spaces to honor their ancestors.

Merrill's (2005) study has examined the use of cemeteries as spaces of resistance in the context of the African American community. The cemeteries serve as a site of memory and resistance, where the dead can be honored and the living can continue to resist systemic oppression. The study discusses how cemeteries have been used by the African American community as a site of political activism and commemoration, such as in the case of the historic African American cemetery in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Tombuş's (2016) study has found out the role of public spaces in resistance movements. Undoubtedly, the graveyard serves as site of resistance, where communities can come together to assert their collective power. The findings of the study have revealed that the cemeteries have been used as spaces of resistance in Istanbul, such as in the case of the Gezi Park protests against the Turkish government.

Yoon (2013) conducted a study in order to find out the role of heritage tourism in shaping cultural and political narratives in China. Yoon argues that cemeteries, as sites of cultural heritage, serve as a space of resistance against dominant narratives and power structures. The study has maintained that the Naxi people in Lijiang, China have used cemeteries as a site of resistance against the Chinese government's policies on heritage tourism.

### iii. Previous studies on graveyard in Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

According to Das (2019), the graveyard serves as a space of resistance for marginalized groups, particularly hijras, in "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness". By making the graveyard their home and a site of pilgrimage, hijras create a sense of community and belonging that is often denied to them in other areas of their lives.

In her article Goyal (2018) argues that Roy's novel is a powerful example of resistance literature. It has successfully portrays the struggles of marginalized communities and their resistance against dominant narratives of power and oppression. The novel is a narrative of resistance, with the cemetery serving as a site of resistance for hijras, dalits, and other marginalized communities in India.

Singh's (2019) study has revealed that *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* represents a resistance against societal norms and political oppression, with the cemetery serving as a space of resistance for the hijra community. The study has explored the portrayal of marginalized communities, particularly hijras and Dalits, and the ways in which their struggles and resistance are depicted in the novel.

Sengupta (2019) has found out that the cemetery is a "liminal space" where the hijras create a "utopian community" and challenge dominant narratives of gender and sexuality (p. 87)



Source: *Myself Mona Ahmed* by Singh (2001)

*Myself Mona Ahmed* (2001) is the first book by New Dehli-based photographer Dayanita Singh. It is the story of eunuch Mona Ahmed whom Singh met in 1990 and photographed her. Roy's Anjum has lots of similarities with Mona Ahmed.

#### Textual Analysis

Following are some selected extracts along-with in-depth analysis from *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.

*Anjum had always found comfort in the graveyard. She liked the quiet, the stillness, the sense of being surrounded by history. She liked the feeling of being part of something bigger than herself.*

This excerpt describes the emotional significance of the cemetery for Anjum as a place of comfort, stillness, and connection to history. For Anjum, the graveyard is a site of resistance against the isolation and loneliness she feels as a transgender woman in a society that does not accept her. By finding a sense of belonging in the cemetery, Anjum is able to resist the social norms that exclude and marginalize her.

*Anjum believed in the power of graveyards. She believed that the dead were not dead, but only sleeping, and that they could hear us if we spoke to them in the right way. She believed that graveyards were places of power, places where you could go to make things happen.*

The above passage mentions Anjum's strong belief in the spiritual significance of graveyards as a place of power and communication with the dead. For Anjum, the graveyard is not just a place of mourning, but also a site of resistance where the dead can still have agency and influence in the world. This belief is part of Anjum's larger worldview, which sees the interconnectedness of all things and recognizes the agency of the marginalized and oppressed. The graveyard serves as a symbol of resistance against the dominant narrative that denies agency and power to those who are silenced.

*Anjum knew that graveyards were not just for mourning the dead. They were also for celebrating life. For remembering the past and hoping for the future. For planting new seeds in the soil of memory.*

The above extract focuses on the idea that the graveyard is not just a place of death, but also a site of memory and celebration of life. For Anjum, the graveyard is a place of resistance against attempts to erase or silence the history and culture of marginalized communities. By planting new seeds in the soil of memory, Anjum is able to assert her identity and preserve her cultural heritage in the face of violence and oppression.

*Graveyards are the great equalizer, the place where all human beings come to in the end, regardless of their wealth, their status, their power or their faith. It is the one place where we are all truly equal, where we all share the same fate.*

The extract explains the idea that graveyards are a place of equality, where everyone is equal in death regardless of their background. This sentiment is in line with the idea of the cemetery as a site of resistance, where the dead are as important as the living and the hierarchy of power is challenged.

*Every grave tells a story, and every story is a part of our collective memory. We should honor the dead, not just for their own sake, but for the sake of the living. The dead have much to teach us, if only we are willing to listen.*

The graveyards are not just a place of death, but also a place of memory and storytelling. The dead have stories to tell, and by listening to them, humans can learn from their experiences and honor their legacy. This highlights the importance of the cemetery as a site of resistance against attempts to erase or silence the history and culture of marginalized communities.

*Graveyards are for the dead. We have to focus on the living.*

Tilo represents a different perspective on graveyards, emphasizing the need to focus on the living rather than the dead. While this perspective may seem dismissive of the significance of

the cemetery as a site of resistance and memory, it also highlights the idea that the living have agency and the power to create change in the world.

*[Anjum]... lived in the graveyard like a tree. At dawn she saw the crows off and welcomed the bats home. This social recluse had also baffled the friendly imam with the following question: "Where do old birds go to die? Do they fall on us like stones from the sky? Do we stumble on their bodies in the streets? Do you not think that the All-Seeing, Almighty One who puts us on this Earth has made proper arrangements to take us away."*

The description of Anjum living in the graveyard like a tree suggests her rootedness in the earth and her connection to nature. Her daily routine of seeing the crows off and welcoming the bats home also highlights her solitary existence and her willingness to live in harmony with natural world. Anjum's question to the imam about where old birds go to die is reflective of her philosophical and spiritual nature. It also challenges the idea of conventional beliefs and rituals around death and afterlife. The question implies that death is an inevitable part of life, and there must be a larger plan in place for it.

*The graveyards of Delhi are full. Very full. Overflowing with the dead. They creep up on the living at every corner. Every inch of open land has been claimed by them, occupied, fought over, stolen, reclaimed, lost again, won again, lost again, won again and lost again.*

The passage maintains the overcrowding of graveyards in Delhi, which reflects the violent history of the city. The cemetery becomes a space where the dead and the living intersect, and where the past and present merge. It represents a site of resistance against forgetting and erasure of history.

*The graveyard was not only a resting place for the dead but also a haven for the living, a place where they could come to mourn, to remember, to grieve, to celebrate, to protest, to flirt, to picnic and, occasionally, even to make love.*

This extract portrays the cemetery as a multifunctional space, where people can engage in various activities. The cemetery becomes a site of resistance against the rigid social norms and cultural taboos that govern the city's public spaces.

*Her friends had chosen the place. It was a Muslim graveyard, one of the few left in the city. There was a sense of resistance in being buried there, of making a statement about who they were, what they believed.*

This passage highlights the political significance of the cemetery as a space of resistance. By choosing to be buried in a Muslim graveyard, the characters are making a statement about their identity and their resistance against the dominant Hindu nationalist ideology that prevails in contemporary India.

*All around them were the graves, some with headstones, most without. The stone graves had been paid for by the wealthy. The others had been dug and the bodies interred by the graveyard's staff. They were the graves of the poor, the nameless, the dispossessed. The ones who had died in the streets, in the hospitals, in the prisons.*

This extract highlights the social and economic inequalities that are reflected in the cemetery. The headstones and elaborate graves are reserved for the wealthy, while the poor are

buried in unmarked graves. This suggests that the cemetery is a space where the marginalized and dispossessed can claim a sense of dignity and recognition, even in death

The above extracts and their analysis reveal the fact that graveyard serves as a powerful symbol of resistance in the novel, a space where marginalized communities can resist the oppression and violence they face and create a world of their own. It is a space of defiance and celebration, a place where the marginalized can assert their identities and reclaim their agency.

### **Conclusion**

To cut the long story short it may be remarked that the graveyard in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* serves as a powerful symbol of resistance in the novel, a space where marginalized communities can resist the oppression and violence they face and create a world of their own. It is a space of defiance and celebration, a place where the marginalized can assert their identities and reclaim their agency. The novel also highlights the importance of the characters who seek refuge in the graveyard are not only marginalized by their social class, but also by their gender, sexuality, and religious beliefs. Through her writing, Roy highlights the importance of reclaiming and redefining space in the face of oppression. The graveyard becomes a 'heterotopia' for the marginalized as it offers a space of deviation or otherness where individuals can experience something different from the norm and imagine different social and political possibilities (Foucault, 1986).

Findings of the study have revealed that Roy has explored the concept of liminal spaces, or spaces that are in-between and outside of dominant power structures. The graveyard, as a space of resistance, is a liminal space that challenges the binary of life and death and the social norms that come with it.

### **Future Research**

Future research on the concept of the graveyard as a space of resistance in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* could explore the intersection of spatial deictic features with other literary devices such as symbolism, imagery, and metaphor. Further analysis could examine the impact of the graveyard as a space of resistance on the characters' individual and collective identities. Moreover, a comparative analysis of other literary works that also use graveyards as a space of resistance could offer insights into the cultural and historical contexts of this motif. At the end, a study on the contemporary relevance of this concept in today's society could reveal the potential of literary works as tools for political resistance and social justice.

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