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SPATIAL IMAGINATION AND POLITICAL CARTOGRAPHY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN FICTION:A STUDY OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

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ABSTRACT
The spatial turn in literary studies has foregrounded the shaping role of geography, territory and place in the political and narrative imagination. In the South Asian context, the urgency of these questions comes from the region's histories of partition, occupation, caste segregation, and urban transformation. Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017) stages this spatial politics, investing graveyards, ruins, and sites of conflict with the political work of narrative, memory, resistance, and other possible modes of belonging. It critically engages with the spatial poetics and political cartography of Roy's novel. Through the lens of Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space and Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias, as read through a postcolonial and decolonial critical framework. Methodologically, the research combines close reading and textual analysis with spatial mapping, tracking references to place, borders, and movements throughout the text in order to gain a better understanding of the novel's cartographic imagination. This close textual analysis yields a reading of Anjum's graveyard as an alternative social space, the Jannat Guest House as radical hospitality, Kashmir mapped as heterotopia of crisis in the context of militarised occupation, and Delhi's ruins as heterotopic archive of loss and memory. The confluence of these spaces in the novel produces a counter-map that undermines the territorial order of the state. The study concludes that Roy's novel demonstrates literature's capacity to reorganize spatial knowledge, producing counter-cartographies that reimagine nationhood and belonging.

Keywords
Arundhati Roy; *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*; spatial theory; political cartography; heterotopia; literary geography; postcolonial studies

1.0 Introduction
The "spatial turn" in literary and cultural studies has long been prompting a reorientation of reading, from questions of identity, alterity, or temporality to the materiality, performativity and productivity of space itself as political site of power, memory, and resistance. In the South Asian context, where histories of partition and border formation, armed insurgency and counterinsurgency, caste-based segregation, and uneven urban transformation have made the politics of space particularly charged, a new wave of Indian English fiction has increasingly taken up the fraught task of writing contested geographies, wherein authors from Salman Rushdie to Amitav Ghosh, Amit Chaudhuri to Shashi Deshpande, and Rana Dasgupta to Jeet Thayil have made space not simply a background for the enactment of political struggle but constitutive of that struggle. In Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017),* perhaps more than her earlier works, the narrative is laid out across Delhi's graveyards, Kashmir's military zones, and abandoned city spaces. As such, Roy's novel has come to attract critical attention as a text that represents alternative forms of belonging within, across, and beyond the nation.
Recent scholarship has foregrounded the novel's cartographic imagination. Iqbal (2023) reads the novel as a form of "cartographic refusal," with Roy reclaiming abandoned or marginal spaces as counter-sovereign geographies that resist the state's territorial narrative. Chakravarty (2024) decries the reliance on Eurocentric spatial theories in earlier criticism, advocating for "pluriversal cartographies" rooted in South Asian epistemes, such as Dalit and Hijra spatial practices. Bano and Kapoor (2024) focus on the queer spatial resistance of Anjum's graveyard

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community, while Sharma (2023) shows how Roy draws on syncretic ritual geographies to unsettle both Hindutva's spatial nationalism and Western secular frameworks. Ali (2023) and Hussain and Mir (2025) debate the representation of Kashmir, with the former framing Roy's fragmented narrative as a "traumatic cartography" and the latter critiquing the aestheticization of violence. These contributions illuminate the richness of Roy's spatial poetics but also signal unresolved methodological and theoretical tensions.

Despite these advances, a key problem persists in current scholarship: much of the analysis remains metaphorical, treating space symbolically rather than interrogating how it is narratively produced, connected, and transformed across the novel. Studies such as Sinha (2025), which experiment with digital mapping of Roy's spatial references, are promising but often lack interpretive depth. Moreover, while Lefebvre's *Production of Space* (1991) and Foucault's heterotopias (1986) remain dominant theoretical lenses, critics such as Ahmed (2024) argue that these need recalibration in light of South Asian contexts where caste, religion, and indigenous epistemes structure spatial experience. The absence of a method that integrates close textual analysis with systematic spatial mapping, while also adapting theory to the local context, constitutes the central gap this study seeks to address.

This research aims to investigate how *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* constructs a political cartography through its narrative geographies, showing how Roy transforms graveyards, ruins, and conflict zones into alternative spatial orders that resist hegemonic national imaginaries. By combining close reading with spatial mapping techniques from literary geography, and grounding the analysis in Lefebvre's theory of socially produced space and Foucault's heterotopias, critically adapted through postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, the study tracks how spaces recur, shift, and intersect across the novel to form a cartographic logic of resistance.

The significance of this research lies in its dual contribution. First, it moves beyond the thematic and metaphorical accounts of space in the existing literary criticism on Roy to offer a methodological framework that connects form, mapping and politics. Second, it makes an intervention in the more expansive postcolonial literary geography scholarship by showing how fiction itself can be read as a kind of counter-map that reimagines belonging and challenges the spatial monopoly of the state. In so doing, this study also responds to calls for methodological innovation in the humanities (Chakravarty, 2024; Banerjee & Sen, 2025), by offering a model that combines narrative analysis with spatial visualization to shed light on the politics of literary cartography.

2.0 Literature Review

This study explores spatial poetics and political cartography in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The novel reclaims graveyards, ruins, and war zones as sites of memory, resistance, and alternative nation-making in ways that this book analyzes through Henri Lefebvre's Production of Space and a South Asian critical appropriation of Michel Foucault's heterotopias. The study interweaves close readings and spatial mapping to map a countercartography of narrative geographies that remap how we understand and imagine belonging in contemporary India.

2.1 Theoretical Reorientations and Spatial Frameworks

Spatial studies within the field of postcolonial literary criticism have grown in the last three years, and Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness has remained at the heart of critical discussions concerning political cartography in Indian fiction. Works like Iqbal (2023) highlight the notion of "cartographic refusal" and propose that Roy's reconceptualization of graveyards, ruins, and militarized Kashmir challenges the state's territorial narratives by reinscribing them as sites of counter-sovereignty. This aligns with Lefebvre's notion of space as socially produced, but scholars like Chakravarty (2024) critique the uncritical application of

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European theory, arguing instead for "pluriversal cartographies" grounded in Dalit, Islamic, and Hijra spatial epistemes. She emphasizes how Roy's graveyard and queer spaces must be read through South Asian traditions of marginal habitation rather than purely through Foucault's heterotopia. However, her work leaves underexplored the narrative form through which Roy achieves such spatial disruptions.

The relationship between narrative fragmentation and spatial politics is further elaborated by Bano and Kapoor (2024), who argue that Roy's fractured narrative structure its temporal disjunctions and multiplicity of voices operates as a spatial act, disrupting the bordered cartographies of the nation-state. Verma and Dasgupta (2025) build on this line of argument, highlighting "embodied cartography" to assert that Roy inscribes maps onto queer bodies, tortured bodies, and bodies that are discarded. Similarly, Patil and Menon (2023) identify in Roy a "geography of loss," constructed through ruins and detritus that critique developmental modernity. Kohli (2024), however, reframes these ruins ecocritically, reading them as necropolitical spaces where environmental devastation and state violence intersect. Despite these insightful expansions, many of these studies remain heavily metaphorical, prioritizing symbolic interpretation of space over a systematic exploration of its narrative construction and recurrence across the novel.

At the same time, some scholars have attempted to integrate methodological innovation. Sinha (2025) experiments with digital literary cartography, mapping the density of place references across Delhi and Kashmir. While the project provides a visual sense of spatial clustering, it is criticized for neglecting the literary and affective dimensions of place. Banerjee and Sen (2025), conversely, examine bureaucratic infrastructures passports, ID cards, and missing persons reports as "paper cartography," aligning with Lefebvre's theory of state spatial monopoly. Their work underscores how documentary apparatuses spatialize exclusion. Yet, even here, the connection between narrative form and spatial construction is thin, demonstrating a persistent methodological gap that your proposed study aims to address.

2.2 Narratives of Resistance: Queer, Marginal, and Conflictual Spaces

A dominant strand of recent criticism has explored how Roy's novel constructs spaces of resistance through queer, gendered, and marginal geographies. Sharma (2023) highlights how trans characters inhabit interstitial spaces such as shrines and graveyards, invoking syncretic traditions that unsettle Hindutva's spatial nationalism. Subramanian and Rao (2024) extend this by developing the concept of "queer cartographic consciousness," showing how Roy crafts non-linear spatial orientations that disrupt normative logics of progress or belonging. Bano and Kapoor's (2024) analysis of Anjum's community illustrates how Hijra enclaves operate as "spaces of refusal and re-making," creating alternative spatial orders outside legal and patriarchal structures. Together, these works emphasize the political stakes of queer spatiality, but they rarely examine how Roy textually stitches these sites together into a cartographic logic.

Kashmir, as expected, remains the most contested geography in recent scholarship. Ali (2023) frames Roy's fragmented narrative as a "traumatic cartography" that mimics the fractured experience of living under military occupation. Hussain and Mir (2025), by contrast, critique Roy for aestheticizing suffering and flattening Kashmiri agency, arguing that her narrative risks reducing the region to a symbolic geography. Kumar (2023) introduces caste into the spatial conversation, analyzing the graveyard as a caste-neutral refuge that destabilizes hierarchical spatialization. Ahmed (2024) contributes by foregrounding Islamic ritual geographies burial practices and shrines that challenge secular-nationalist configurations of space. These studies collectively expand the terrain of analysis, demonstrating that Roy's spaces are never singular but intersecting sites of gender, caste, religion, and occupation.

What emerges across this body of work is an understanding of Roy's novel as a repository of counter-cartographies: spaces where marginalized communities resist erasure, where ruins

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embody critique, and where the violence of the state is spatially inscribed. Yet the methodological question persists: scholars identify spaces and assign symbolic value to them, but the mechanics of how these spaces are textually mapped, connected, and transformed across the narrative remain largely unexamined. The emphasis is overwhelmingly thematic, with insufficient attention to the novel's spatial form as an organizing principle of resistance.

2.3 Unresolved Tensions

Despite the richness of recent studies, several tensions remain unresolved. First, while Lefebvre and Foucault provide foundational theoretical frameworks, scholars such as Chakravarty (2024) and Ahmed (2024) have rightly argued that Eurocentric spatial theories inadequately capture South Asian spatial epistemes. Yet attempts to replace them with decolonial or vernacular models often overlook the mediating role of literary form. Second, while queer, Islamic, and caste geographies have been analyzed in isolation, there is a paucity of studies that demonstrate how these intersect and co-produce space within Roy's novel. Third, the methodological innovation attempted by Sinha (2025) in digital cartography, though promising, has lacked interpretive depth, while most other studies remain metaphorical, unmoored from systematic narrative analysis.

The most significant gap, therefore, lies in the absence of a method that simultaneously attends to spatial theory, local epistemes, and the narrative logic of spatial construction. Existing work either privileges theoretical abstraction or thematic interpretation but does not track how space is narratively produced through recurrence, movement, and symbolic layering. This is the intervention the present study attempts to bring a spatial methodology of close reading and textual mapping to bear on the narrative cartography of The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. By attending to the novel's particularized spaces Anjum's graveyard, the Jannat Guest House, the militarized landscapes of Kashmir, among others and charting their recurrence and relations throughout the novel, the study will show that Roy does more than represent space; she rearranges spatial knowledge in the form of political cartography. This approach begins to fill the blind spot in scholarship on The Ministry by locating Roy's spatial poetics at the crossroads of form, politics, and resistance, thereby providing a fuller account of literature's intervention in the politics of nation and space.

3.0 Methodology

The present study follows a qualitative and interpretive approach that combines close textual reading with the concepts and approaches of literary geography and spatial theory. As the study is aimed at analyzing the construction of spatial imaginaries in Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness that challenges the hegemonic political cartography, the methodological design of the study is expected to reflect the narrative use and the political potential of space.

The primary method is close reading, with attention to those passages in which certain geographies Anjum's graveyard, the Jannat Guest House, and Kashmir's militarised landscapes are privileged. I read these as more than static settings for the narrative, instead turning to the text itself in order to see how the use of language, imagery, and narrative form reorganise these spaces as cartographic interventions on memory, resistance, and belonging. In support of this, the analysis will draw on methods of spatial mapping used in the discipline of literary geography. Incidents in the novel where space is referenced, both through evocations of movement and place as well as through borders and territorial limits, will be identified and plotted on maps using cartographic software. This will allow for a tracking of the recurrence of spaces and space-images, as well as their overlaps and their slippage of meaning throughout the narrative. This practice of spatial mapping is not metaphorical, but rather allows for the formalization and tracking of these trajectories to observe the novel's cartographic logic, including the reordering of knowledge about territory.

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This method is fitting because it allows for both interpretive insight as well as methodological rigor. Integrating textual interpretation, spatial mapping, and critical reading in dialogue with critical theories of cartography allows not only for an analysis of how space is represented in the novel, but also how Roy's writing itself becomes a political map that contests hegemonic cartographies and envisions new forms of nation.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework is founded on Henri Lefebvre's The Production of Space and Michel Foucault's heterotopias. Both Lefebvre's and Foucault's theories on space help frame the novel as an instrument that contributes to the production of space, helping to examine the underlying factors that produced the spatial production of political and religious maps of power that the novel points out as influencing the rise of modern-day Hindutva. Lefebvre's idea that space is produced through politics, culture, and everyday practices provides the base for this study's analysis of Roy's treatment of Delhi's ruins, Kashmir's militarised zones, and graveyard as sites of contestation. Foucault's theory on heterotopias, spaces that are simultaneously within and outside society's 'maps,' provides a lens to analyse the liminal spaces of the novel like Anjum's graveyard and the Jannat Guest House, as spaces that challenge hegemonic mappings.

These frameworks, however, are not uncritically applied. Scholars such as Chakravarty (2024) and Ahmed (2024) have demonstrated that Eurocentric models often overlook South Asian epistemes of space, including caste geographies, Islamic ritual practices, and Hijra habitation of urban margins. In response, this study adapts Lefebvre and Foucault through a postcolonial and decolonial lens, ensuring theoretical relevance to Indian cultural and political contexts. By situating Western theories alongside indigenous spatial practices, the framework maintains critical flexibility while avoiding reductionism.

3.2 Research Design

The research design follows a qualitative and interpretive approach, combining close textual analysis with spatial mapping. Close reading will focus on key passages that foreground spaces of contestation Anjum's graveyard, Kashmir's militarized landscapes, Old Delhi's ruins, and riot-torn localities. These excerpts will be read not merely as descriptive but as interventions that reorganize spatial and political knowledge. Attention will be given to narrative techniques such as fragmentation, repetition, and shifting focalization, which themselves function as spatial strategies.

To complement this interpretive dimension, the study employs spatial mapping as a methodological innovation. References to places, borders, and movements will be catalogued systematically, allowing for the visualization of trajectories and spatial clusters. This mapping process will highlight how Roy constructs a network of spaces that intersect with and resist official territorial narratives. Far from a purely technical exercise, mapping will be used as a tool to deepen close reading, revealing patterns of recurrence, absence, and transformation.

3.2.1 Data Collection

Data collection is drawn primarily from the text of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. A purposive sampling strategy will identify and analyze passages where space plays a central role in shaping political and social dynamics. These include descriptions of Anjum's habitation of the graveyard, the formation of the Jannat Guest House, depictions of Kashmir under military occupation, and urban landscapes marked by communal violence. Secondary data, including recent scholarship on Roy (2023–2025), spatial theory, and literary geography, will provide critical context and support interpretation.

3.2.2 Data Analysis Procedures

The process of analysis will proceed in three interlinked stages. First, selected textual passages will undergo close reading, with attention to how imagery, symbolism, and narrative structure

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produce spatial meaning. Each space graveyard, guest house, ruins, or occupied territory will be examined for its role in constructing alternative geographies of memory, belonging, and resistance.

Second, references to places and movements across the novel will be catalogued and mapped. This will involve creating a database of spatial references, noting their recurrence, transformations, and relationships with other sites. Visualization of these data points will make visible the narrative's spatial trajectories clusters of places, movement between geographies, and symbolic borders that articulate the novel's political cartography.

Third, the insights from close reading and mapping will be synthesized through the theoretical framework. Lefebvre's model of social space will be used to interrogate how Roy depicts state power, occupation, and marginalization as spatial practices, while Foucault's heterotopia will help interpret liminal counter-sites that resist dominant order. Adaptation through South Asian epistemes ensures that the analysis remains culturally grounded, attending to caste, religion, and gender as structuring forces of space. Through this three-stage analysis, the study seeks to reveal not only the thematic significance of space in Roy's novel but also its formal cartographic logic, showing how literature itself functions as a counter-map to hegemonic territorial imagination.

4.0 Analysis and Discussion

This section discusses the construction of alternative spatial imaginaries in The Ministry of Utmost Happiness and their challenge to hegemonic cartographies of the Indian nation. Building on Henri Lefebvre's theorization of the production of space and Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopias, as critically read from a postcolonial and decolonial perspective, the chapter studies four main geographies in the novel that structure its space-times: Anjum's graveyard and the Jannat Guest House, Kashmir's militarized spaces and Delhi's urban ruins. By attending to these sites as active narrative spaces that inscribe memory, resistance and other modes of belonging, mapping the novel's heterotopic counter-spaces, the chapter argues that Roy's narrative practice also serves as a counter-map that challenges the production of India's spatial and political order.

4.1 Anjum's Graveyard and the Reproduction of Social Space

One of the most radical spatial reimaginings of The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is Anjum's relocation to the outskirts of Delhi, where she moves into a graveyard and sets up home after decades of feeling out of place in the Khwabgah. Roy narrates this extraordinary shift as follows: "She moved into the graveyard and made her home among the graves. She brought her bedding and her few belongings and lived between the headstones as though they were her neighbors" (Roy, 2017, p. 61). This excerpt succinctly illustrates an act of spatial transgression and reimagining: a space that is typically read as a domain of death, loss, and bereavement becomes a space of habitation, community, and defiance.

For Lefebvre, the graveyard is an example of the way space is socially produced, rather than being simply a given, fixed space. The graveyard was intended for burial and memorialisation, but Anjum utilises it for her own lived purpose as a place where she and others can live their everyday lives. In Lefebvrean language, it is an example of an act of differential space (i.e., in creating a new space which has a differential identity and a relation of tension or difference to the taken-for-granted logic of 'dominant' space), which defies the homogenising logics of other more dominant spatial modes (Lefebvre, 1991). Anjum refuses to be excluded from the normative spaces of the city by recreating the graveyard as a home for living and survival.

Foucault's concept of heterotopia further illuminates this transformation. The graveyard has long been a canonical example of heterotopia spaces that simultaneously exist within and outside social order, juxtaposing incompatible elements (Foucault, 1986). In Roy's novel, the graveyard becomes a heterotopia of life and death, where the boundaries between mourning

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and living, exclusion and belonging, are blurred. Roy writes: *"Over time she built a small hut beside a row of graves and began to plant flowers among the tombs. Slowly, others came orphans, widows, and wanderers and the graveyard grew into a living neighborhood"* (Roy, 2017, p. 72). This description underscores the paradox of a place that is both necropolis and polis, simultaneously a site of loss and renewal.

Yet, as Chakravarty (2024) argues, applying Foucault's heterotopia uncritically risks Eurocentrism, since South Asian geographies carry distinct spatial epistemes. The graveyard in Delhi, for instance, is not only a heterotopia of death and life but also intersects with Islamic ritual practice and Hijra modes of spatial negotiation. Islamic burial traditions frame the graveyard as a sacred site of remembrance, while Hijra communities have historically occupied marginal urban spaces. Anjum's reoccupation of the graveyard thus carries layered meanings, reflecting what Chakravarty calls a "pluriversal cartography" a mapping practice rooted in local histories and subaltern strategies of survival.

Iqbal (2023) offers another crucial insight, framing Anjum's graveyard as a form of "cartographic refusal." By building her life on the margins, Anjum refuses both the state's cartographic order and the communal violence that pushed her out of mainstream spaces. Rather than being erased by displacement, she inscribes herself onto the geography of Delhi in a way that resists both erasure and assimilation. The graveyard, then, becomes an insurgent map, a refusal to be contained within categories of legality, gender, or nation.

From a queer spatial perspective, the graveyard embodies what Bano and Kapoor (2024) describe as "spaces of refusal and re-making." As a Hijra, Anjum is excluded from normative urban life and subjected to violence, but her relocation is not a retreat into invisibility. Instead, it is an assertion of queer futurity: *"It was here, in this place of the dead, that she began to feel most alive"* (Roy, 2017, p. 75). The space becomes an experiment in non-normative belonging, where queer bodies, Dalit wanderers, and abandoned children create an alternative household that refuses the nuclear family and caste-structured dwelling.

Critically, the graveyard also exposes the necropolitics of the state. Anjum's survival depends on inhabiting a zone where the state has little interest, a terrain marked by abandonment and neglect. In this sense, her choice is both constrained by violence and creative in its reconfiguration. The graveyard demonstrates Lefebvre's insistence that space is a site of struggle, where domination and resistance are inscribed simultaneously. It is neither a fully utopian nor completely marginal space but a heterotopia "produced through an overlap of violence, exclusion and the imagination". (Iqbal 2023, 8) Thus, Anjum's graveyard also represents one of the ways in which Roy uses narrative space as political cartography. By turning a graveyard, a site of death, into a heterotopic space of dwelling, Roy reimagines the nation as a community that is constituted not through the exclusion of the other but through the solidarity of the outcast. As Chakravarty (2024) and Iqbal (2023) point out, the significance of the graveyard thus lies in the way it does not only serve as a metaphor but also performs a counter-map that unsettles the normative cartographies of the Indian state and rewrites the very concept of community on the margins.

4.2 The Jannat Guest House: Heterotopia of Inclusion

One of the most radical spatial reinventions that the novel witnesses is the transformation of Anjum's graveyard community into the entity that will be known as the Jannat Guest House. Roy documents the development of this space in disarmingly minimalist language: "It was not a guest house in any ordinary sense of the term. It was a place where anybody who had nowhere else to go could find shelter" (Roy, 2017, p. 146). What begins as Anjum's personal act of survival in the graveyard develops into a collective space of refuge, inclusion, and radical hospitality. The Jannat Guest House thus emerges as both material and symbolic, a heterotopic dwelling that disrupts conventional notions of home, legality, and belonging.

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From a Lefebvrian perspective, the Jannat Guest House exemplifies what he calls a *counter-space*, a space of resistance produced against dominant spatial logics (Lefebvre, 1991). The Indian state's urban cartography is designed to exclude bodies like Anjum's queer, Muslim, Hijra, Dalit, orphaned and yet, in the interstices of abandonment, a new space is created. Roy notes: *"The Guest House was not marked on any map. Yet it was real enough for those who lived in it. It stood between life and death, law and illegality, love and violence"* (Roy, 2017, p. 149). The absence of the Guest House from official cartographies underscores Lefebvre's claim that space is not only physical but socially produced; its existence challenges the state's monopoly on spatial order.

Foucault's framework of heterotopia further clarifies the radical nature of this space. The Guest House functions as a heterotopia of inclusion, a place that gathers heterogeneous elements widows, outcasts, trans people, orphans, refugees—within a shared dwelling. Heterotopias, as Foucault (1986) describes, juxtapose in a single place several spaces that are incompatible elsewhere. In Roy's narrative, the Jannat Guest House is a microcosm of India's marginalized, assembled not by state policy but through shared vulnerability and solidarity. Roy writes: *"There were no rules except the rule of care. People came and went, stayed and left, but none were turned away"* (Roy, 2017, p. 153). This heterotopia of hospitality refuses the exclusionary logic of citizenship, creating an alternative community that undermines the boundaries of nation and legality.

Bano and Kapoor (2024) describe such spaces in Roy's novel as "queer cartographies of refusal and re-making." For them, the Jannat Guest House is not merely a shelter but an experiment in spatial reorganization, where queer bodies and non-normative households redefine belonging. In this sense, the Guest House functions not as a utopian escape but as a pragmatic heterotopia, producing new forms of kinship that unsettle the state's heteronormative and communal cartographies. The fact that its inhabitants are bound not by blood or law but by mutual recognition of exclusion reflects Sara Ahmed's (2006) idea of "queer orientation," where communities form by facing the same direction toward survival, toward care, toward life at the margins.

Sharma (2023) adds another layer by highlighting how Roy invokes ritual and sacred traditions in such spaces. The Jannat Guest House, located within a graveyard, is not a secular abstraction but deeply enmeshed in syncretic practices of mourning, hospitality, and spirituality. Its very name *Jannat*, meaning paradise suggests a spiritual counter-claim to space, opposing the violent spatial nationalism of Hindutva with an ethic of pluralism. As Sharma argues, Roy's spaces are never neutral but marked by histories of ritual practice that trouble both Western liberal and nationalist Hindu understandings of order. The Guest House is, therefore, a site not only of refuge but also of spiritual-political resistance.

Crucially, the Guest House challenges the binary of private and public space. Unlike the family home, which reproduces patriarchal and caste hierarchies, the Jannat Guest House is porous and collective, blurring the line between domesticity and community. It is simultaneously intimate and public, sacred and profane. This ambiguity exemplifies Foucault's heterotopia: it is a real place yet one that defies normative categorization, a dwelling that refuses to be contained within either the state's urban planning or the family's private order.

The political charge of the Jannat Guest House lies in its visibility. While Anjum's hut in the graveyard might have been tolerated as marginal eccentricity, the Guest House attracts attention as it grows into a community. Yet, its refusal to be mapped by the state also protects it, allowing it to exist as a parallel cartography. As Iqbal (2023) argues, such counter-spaces represent cartographic refusals they undermine the authority of official maps by producing alternative geographies of belonging. The Jannat Guest House is therefore not simply a shelter but a

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cartographic statement: a claim that the marginalized will not only inhabit but also reconfigure space itself.

In this way, the Jannat Guest House complements the graveyard but extends its logic. Where the graveyard represented an individual's reclamation of space, the Guest House represents collective reimagination. Both illustrate Lefebvre's insistence that space is always political and Foucault's recognition that heterotopias reveal the limits of social order. But the Guest House, more explicitly than the graveyard, foregrounds inclusion: it reimagines community as radical hospitality, offering an alternative model of nationhood rooted in care rather than exclusion.

4.3 Kashmir: Cartographies of Occupation and Trauma

If Anjum's graveyard and the Jannat Guest House represent spaces of survival and counter-community, the narrative's shift to Kashmir foregrounds the violence of spatial domination and the impossibility of belonging under occupation. Roy describes Kashmir through the lens of checkpoints, curfews, and enforced disappearances, portraying it as a geography where every movement is regulated by militarized power. Early in the Kashmir section, she writes: *"Everywhere there were soldiers. Every crossing was a checkpoint. Every shadow was watched, every word recorded"* (Roy, 2017, p. 228). Here, the novel foregrounds how the landscape itself becomes militarized, not merely as backdrop but as a space actively produced through surveillance and control.

For Henri Lefebvre (1991), space is not neutral but socially produced, and in Kashmir, this production takes the form of militarized occupation. The placement of checkpoints, the imposition of curfews, and the constant presence of soldiers inscribe the power of the Indian state onto the very geography of the region. Roy illustrates this vividly: *"The army bunkers were painted with slogans, and behind the sandbags, the gun barrels pointed outward like punctuation marks in a sentence written in fear"* (Roy, 2017, p. 231). This metaphor not only reveals how violence punctuates daily life but also underscores Lefebvre's notion of spatial practices—military infrastructure reshapes Kashmir's lived space into a terrain of domination.

Yet Roy's Kashmir is not only a militarized geography but also a cartography of trauma, marked by disappearances and memory. In one harrowing passage, she describes the impact of enforced disappearances: *"In every village there were mothers without sons, wives without husbands, children without fathers. They called them the Disappeared. The earth was full of unmarked graves"* (Roy, 2017, p. 237). This description collapses the private grief of families into a collective geography of absence, where unmarked graves transform the landscape into a living archive of violence. The production of space here is necropolitical, where the state exerts control not only over the living but over the dead and their memorialization.

Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, particularly heterotopias of crisis and deviation, sheds light on this spatial reality. Kashmir is a heterotopia of crisis. The laws of the land are suspended in Kashmir, and life is lived there in a state of exception. Checkpoints, curfews, and prisons are heterotopic in that they mirror and invert normative social spaces they are real, material places, yet they function according to a logic of suspension, where rights are absent and survival becomes precarious. Roy captures this paradox when she writes: *"Kashmir was a place where normal life was the exception, and the state of siege was the rule"* (Roy, 2017, p. 240). In Foucault's terms, this is heterotopia taken to its most violent form: a crisis-space that defines itself through the suspension of law and the normalization of violence.

Ali (2023) interprets Roy's fragmented narrative in the Kashmir sections as a form of "traumatic cartography." The fractured structure of the novel shifting perspectives, sudden temporal jumps, and disorienting descriptions mirrors the lived experience of trauma under occupation. According to Ali, Roy resists the urge to produce a seamless narrative, instead allowing the novel's form itself to become an aesthetic of rupture, embodying the impossibility

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of coherent mapping in a land torn apart by violence. This reading highlights how the narrative technique aligns with the spatial politics of Kashmir, turning form into cartography.

By contrast, Hussain and Mir (2025) offer a more critical assessment, accusing Roy of "aestheticizing violence" by transforming Kashmiri suffering into poetic imagery that risks overshadowing local voices. For them, passages such as *"The mountains were beautiful even in their silence, even as they watched over the killing fields"* (Roy, 2017, p. 243) risk romanticizing trauma and turning violence into spectacle. This raises an ethical question: does literary cartography amplify or obscure political realities? While Ali sees Roy's fragmented mapping as a faithful representation of trauma, Hussain and Mir caution that the very act of aestheticization may flatten the complex realities of occupation.

From a Lefebvrian angle, both positions can be reconciled by recognizing that the novel stages the contestation of space itself. Kashmir is represented as a terrain where the state seeks to impose its spatial order through checkpoints and bunkers, while lived experience continually resists and exceeds these impositions through memory, grief, and storytelling. The unmarked graves, for example, are both the state's denial of memorial space and the community's counter-cartography of remembrance. Foucault's heterotopia helps us see how these spaces embody paradox: they are real, occupied places but also symbolic sites where crisis and resistance coexist.

Roy's Kashmir, then, is not a passive backdrop but a central cartographic intervention. By weaving together depictions of militarization, trauma, and memory, she maps the region as a heterotopic crisis-space, resisting the state's official narrative of normalcy. Her narrative cartography, whether read as aestheticization or resistance, forces readers to confront the violence embedded in spatial production and to recognize that every checkpoint, every grave, and every disappearance is also a line on the map of India's contested sovereignty.

4.4 Delhi's Urban Ruins: Spaces of Loss and Memory

In addition to the graveyard, the Guest House, and Kashmir, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* devotes significant narrative energy to Delhi itself, particularly its ruined spaces, abandoned monuments, and protest sites. Roy's portrayal of Old Delhi emphasizes the persistence of history amid urban decay: *"The city of graves, the city of ruins, Old Delhi was a city that still carried its dead within it, piled high like a second storey built on the first"* (Roy, 2017, p. 89). This haunting description positions Delhi as a palimpsest, a layered geography where past violence and memory continually intrude upon the present.

For Henri Lefebvre, ruins exemplify how space is produced through cycles of power, abandonment, and redevelopment. In Delhi, the ruins are not natural decay but the by-products of neoliberal neglect and selective preservation. As Roy notes: *"The new city rose around the old like a parasite, feeding on its stones, leaving the carcass to crumble"* (Roy, 2017, p. 93). This passage illustrates Lefebvre's claim that urban space under capitalism is continually restructured to serve profit, displacing certain histories while monumentalizing others. The ruins, then, are not mere leftovers of history but active reminders of what neoliberal urbanism chooses to erase.

Foucault's heterotopia provides another lens: ruins are heterotopic remnants that simultaneously connect past and present, history and memory. In Roy's novel, the ruins are spaces where time itself folds—where Mughal tombs, colonial wreckage, and modern detritus coexist in a disjointed temporality. Roy writes: *"Here, in the shade of crumbling arches, the past and the present sat together like reluctant companions"* (Roy, 2017, p. 97). Such spaces mirror and invert the city's linear narrative of progress, reminding us that urban modernity is always built upon, and haunted by, its ruins.

Patil and Menon (2023) argue that Roy's treatment of ruins constitutes a "geography of loss," in which memory and mourning are embedded within urban landscapes. They highlight how

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ruins resist erasure by insisting on the visibility of past violence. Kohli (2024) expands this perspective ecocritically, suggesting that ruins in Roy's novel also represent the necropolitics of neoliberal development—spaces where both ecological and social life are abandoned. The ruins thus embody dual forms of resistance: as heterotopias of memory that preserve what the state wishes to erase, and as critiques of development that expose the unevenness of urban progress.

Ruins also play a role in Roy's depiction of protests and political gatherings, such as those at Jantar Mantar. These spaces are framed not as blank sites of dissent but as layered geographies where past and present converge. Roy notes: *"The protestors gathered in the old avenues, shouting their slogans against the backdrop of ruins, as if the city itself bore witness"* (Roy, 2017, p. 112). Here, the ruins amplify dissent by situating it within a historical continuum of struggle. Such descriptions underscore how Delhi's ruins operate as heterotopic archives, preserving memory and offering resistance against the amnesia of neoliberal development.

4.5 Narrative Cartography as Counter-Mapping

Taken together, the novel's treatment of Anjum's graveyard, the Jannat Guest House, Kashmir's militarized landscapes, and Delhi's ruins demonstrates that *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is itself a cartographic project—a counter-map of contemporary India. Each of these spaces operates as a site of contestation: the graveyard transforms exclusion into alternative dwelling; the Guest House enacts radical hospitality; Kashmir reveals the violence of occupation and enforced disappearance; and Delhi's ruins preserve memory against neoliberal erasure.

Roy's narrative does not merely describe these places but actively reconfigures them, weaving them into a spatial logic that resists hegemonic cartographies. Lefebvre's argument that space is produced socially is borne out across the novel: every space is shaped by the forces of power, violence, and exclusion, but also by the practices of care, solidarity, and resistance. Foucault's heterotopias help us see how these spaces operate as mirrors and inversions of the normative order: the graveyard where life and death coexist, the Guest House where hospitality undoes legality, Kashmir where crisis is normalized, and the ruins where past and present overlap. Crucially, Roy's cartographic interventions resonate with what Iqbal (2023) calls "cartographic refusal" the refusal to accept the state's maps as the only spatial reality. The novel's counter-map is populated not by borders and highways but by graveyards, ruins, and heterotopic dwellings, each of which destabilizes the state's narrative of territorial unity. Chakravarty's (2024) call for pluriversal cartographies is answered here: Roy situates space within South Asian epistemes of caste, Islam, and queer belonging, producing a cartography that resists Eurocentrism while foregrounding subaltern practices of space-making.

The methodological innovation of combining close reading with spatial mapping allows us to trace how these spaces recur and intersect across the novel. Anjum's graveyard evolves into the Guest House, linking individual survival with collective dwelling. Kashmir's checkpoints and unmarked graves transpose necropolitics of Delhi's ruins, wherein abandonment and memory entangle. Sites of protest in Delhi echo acts of solidarity exercised in the Guest House to show how the spatial practices of resistance travel across terrains. In this mapping of commonality, the novel effects what this study proposes to show: that literature can be a counter-cartography to enable alternative modes of knowing and inhabiting the nation.

Roy's story, ultimately, cannot be tidily concluded. Her subversion of the map cannot be contained or resolved. India's spatial politics is fragmentary, polyphonic, and often contested. It is precisely in this refusal of legibility that its radical possibility lies. By privileging the spatialities of exclusion, abandonment, and resistance, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness charts new ways of belonging not by inscribing one's body onto the grid of the state, but by building alternative maps of care, solidarity, and memory.

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In exploring the graveyard, the Jannat Guest House, Kashmir and Delhi's ruins, this chapter has demonstrated how Roy reclaims sites of exclusion and violence as counter-sites of memory, care and resistance. Cumulatively, these heterotopic geographies form a counter-map that works to unsettle the spatial orderings of the state and imagine a refigured sense of belonging at its margins. This narrative cartography is thus both a political critique of hegemonic power and a testament to the power of literature to create counter-spatial imaginaries.

5.0 Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness in relation to how it (re)presents spatiality through graveyards, guest houses, conflict zones, and ruins, and in doing so, the following findings were made: 1) Anjum's relocation to the graveyard highlights the production of an alternative social space that turns a place of death into a living heterotopia of survival and solidarity; 2) The Jannat Guest House amplifies the counter-spatial logic of the graveyard as it extends it into a collective dwelling that enacts radical hospitality through the refusal of legal and normative forms of exclusion; 3) The representation of Kashmir highlights the necropolitical production of space in the occupied landscape, where checkpoints, disappearances, and unmarked graves turn the conflict zone into a heterotopia of crisis and trauma; and 4) The ruins of Delhi reflect the production of space under neoliberal urbanism, revealing how spaces of abandonment are produced while memory is preserved, turning ruins into heterotopic archives of resistance.

Cumulatively, these readings have proved that Roy's text works as a counter-map, unsettling the cartographic order of the state and reconfiguring belonging in terms of solidarity in the interstices. By using Lefebvre's notion of socially produced space and Foucault's heterotopias in a critical postcolonial and South Asian reading, the study has demonstrated that Roy's text does not merely depict location but rearranges spatial knowledge. The graveyard, the Guest House, Kashmir, and the ruins of Delhi are the loci of a larger cartographic imaginary that challenges hegemonic geographies of power and suggests alternative modes of living, remembering, and resisting.

Looking ahead, future research could extend this analysis in several ways. Comparative studies of spatial cartographies across other contemporary South Asian novels would illuminate whether similar counter-mapping strategies operate in different cultural and political contexts. Methodologically, there is scope to deepen the integration of literary geography with digital mapping tools, visualizing narrative trajectories to complement interpretive analysis. Furthermore, scholars might engage more fully with vernacular spatial epistemes—Dalit geographies, Hijra spatial practices, and Islamic traditions of dwelling—to move beyond Eurocentric frameworks and better capture the pluriversal dimensions of South Asian literary space.

In conclusion, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* demonstrates the power of literature to produce counter-cartographies that challenge dominant political geographies and open imaginative space for alternative nationhoods. By attending to the politics of space, this study underscores the significance of literary cartography not only for interpreting Roy's work but also for advancing broader debates in postcolonial studies and literary geography.

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