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BLAME ON THE BODY, GUILT IN THE SYSTEM: STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND NECROPOLITICAL POWER IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

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Abstract
This study investigates the intricate dynamics of structural violence, necropolitical power, guilt displacement, and ethical resistance in Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness; moreover, it situates the novel within broader socio-political contexts where marginalized bodies—such as those of Hijras, Dalits, Muslims, and political dissidents—are systematically exposed to harm, while institutional mechanisms obscure responsibility. The primary objectives of the study were to examine how Roy's text represents structural violence through embodied suffering, analyze the functioning of necropolitical power in determining whose lives are grievable, explore how guilt is displaced onto vulnerable individuals, and identify forms of ethical resistance and alternative community formations. To achieve these objectives, the study employed a qualitative,

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interpretive methodology, drawing on close textual analysis combined with theoretical frameworks including structural violence theory (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 2004), necro-politics (Mbembe, 2003), and postcolonial ethics (Butler, 2009), while integrating discourse analysis to trace how institutional power operates within the narrative; furthermore, conjunctive adverbs were used in the analysis to maintain logical coherence a cross complex socio-political themes. The findings reveal that structural violence is normalized through institutional neglect and social exclusion; in addition, necropolitical power governs life and death, selectively determining whose suffering is acknowledged and whose is ignored. Guilt is displaced from institutions onto marginalized bodies, thereby preserving state authority, while ethical resistance emerges through relational practices such as care, mourning, and informal community solidarity, which, although provisional, contest the logic of disposability. The study concludes that Roy's novel functions as both a literary archive and a socio-political critique, demonstrating that literature can illuminate systemic oppression and foreground ethical responsibility; moreover, it recommends that policymakers, scholars, and institutions rec ognize the human cost of bureaucratic and militarized systems and foster care, inclusion, and relational solidarity to mitigate the effects of structural and necropolitical violence.

Keywords: *Structural Violence, Necropolitics, Guilt Displacement, Ethical Resistance, Postcolonial Literature, Marginalized Bodies*

Introduction

More than 150 million people in South Asia live under conditions of structural inequality and systemic marginalization, yet their suffering often remains invisible to those in power (Anand, 2021). This stark reality raises a pressing question: How do state institutions perpetuate harm while evading accountability? Literature provides a compelling avenue to explore this dilemma. As Arundhati Roy (2017) asserts through *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the most profound violence is often those that remain hidden—embedded in laws, bureaucracies, and social norms rather than in overt acts of brutality. Similarly, Spivak (1988) warns that the subaltern cannot speak within hegemonic power structures without being erased, highlighting the moral and ethical urgency of marginalized voices. In this context, the present study examines structural violence and Necropolitical power in Roy's novel, focusing on how marginalized bodies absorb harm while institutions remain insulated from guilt (Galtung, 1969; Mbembe, 2003). This topic is crucial now, as contemporary South Asian societies increasingly confront rising authoritarianism, communal polarization, and militarized governance (Gandhi, 2019; Hassan, 2023). Literary narratives, therefore, provide a lens through which to understand the interplay between political power, social exclusion, and embodied suffering (Fanon, 1963; Connell, 2012). By foregrounding the experiences of Muslim, Dalit, queer, and Kashmiri characters, Roy's text illuminates the ways in which structural and Necropolitical forces operate invisibly yet pervasively (Roy, 2017).

Historically, colonial mechanisms of surveillance, legal control, and disciplinary power were inherited and reconfigured in post-independence South Asia, producing political systems that claim legitimacy while normalizing exclusion and repression (Ludden, 2003; Fanon, 1963). Within this framework, structural violence, as defined by Galtung (1969), becomes an everyday condition, and Necropolitical power, as theorized by Mbembe (2003), enables states to determine whose lives are grievable and whose deaths remain inconsequential. Taken together, these frameworks provide the theoretical foundation to analyze how Roy's narrative depicts marginalized bodies as sites where institutional violence is enacted, rationalized, and ultimately erased (Spivak, 1988).

Despite the growing body of scholarship on Roy's fiction, critical analyses have largely focused on nationalism, gender, environmental activism, or postcolonial resistance (Gandhi, 2019; Hassan, 2023). Few studies, however, explore how the novel represents violence not as episodic brutality but as a continuous structural condition governed by Necropolitical logic (Mbembe, 2003; Roy, 2017).

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Moreover, existing research often emphasizes individual suffering without fully interrogating how institutional guilt is displaced onto vulnerable bodies, creating a limited understanding of the mechanisms that allow systemic violence to persist (Spivak, 1999; Anand, 2021).

The central problem, therefore, addressed in this study is the misrecognition of violence as an individual or communal failure rather than as a structural and political process (Galtung, 1969; Mbembe, 2003; Spivak, 1988). Roy's novel vividly depicts how marginalized bodies—Muslim, Dalit, queer, and Kashmiri—are surveilled, criminalized, and rendered disposable, while bureaucratic and legal systems absorb guilt and evade accountability (Roy, 2017; Hassan, 2023). This dynamic perpetuates injustice and normalizes suffering as an inevitable aspect of social order (Fanon, 1963; Galtung, 1969).

Textual evidence consistently illustrates Necropolitical power operating through zones of social death, including prisons, conflict regions, graveyards, and marginalized urban spaces. Characters such as Anjum, Dayachand (Saddam Hussein), and unnamed Kashmiri victims exemplify the ways in which lives are rendered unworthy of protection, mourning, or recognition (Roy, 2017). Thus, Roy's narrative indicts structures that render such violence invisible while exposing the ethical contradictions of a state claiming democracy and unity (Mbembe, 2003; Spivak, 1988).

Within the local and regional context, these depictions resonate with contemporary South Asian realities, including militarized governance, rising authoritarianism, and shrinking democratic spaces (Anand, 2021; Gandhi, 2019). By situating Roy's text as both a cultural document and an ethical intervention, this study highlights the role of literature in exposing systemic harm and ethical failure (Roy, 2017; Spivak, 1999).

In light of these considerations, the primary objective of this study is to examine how *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* represents structural violence and Necropolitical power, how institutional systems displace guilt onto marginalized bodies, and how ethical resistance emerges despite systemic constraints (Galtung, 1969; Mbembe, 2003; Spivak, 1988). Ultimately, the paper contributes to postcolonial literary studies by providing a theoretically integrated reading that illuminates the ethics of suffering, responsibility, and survival in contemporary South Asian contexts (Roy, 2017; Hassan, 2023).

Research Problem

In contemporary South Asian literature, the depiction of violence often emphasizes individual acts of brutality or episodic conflicts. However, systemic and institutional forms of harm remain underexplored. Specifically, in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), marginalized bodies—Muslim, Dalit, queer, and Kashmiri—bear the consequences of state-sanctioned violence, while the systems responsible evade accountability (Galtung, 1969; Mbembe, 2003). The central problem, therefore, addressed in this study is the persistent misrecognition of violence as an individual or communal failure rather than as a structural and political process. Consequently, the study interrogates how structural violence and Necropolitical power operate to displace guilt onto vulnerable bodies while institutions maintain moral and legal immunity (Spivak, 1988; Roy, 2017).

Research Objectives

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine how Roy's novel represents structural violence through the embodied suffering of marginalized communities.
2. To analyze the functioning of Necropolitical power in determining whose lives are grievable and whose are disregarded.

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3. To explore how institutional systems, displace guilt onto vulnerable bodies while preserving their own moral and political authority.
4. To identify instances of ethical resistance and alternative community formations within the novel, even if such resistance is fragmented or provisional.

In addition, these objectives aim to connect literary analysis with socio-political critique, showing how fiction reflects and interrogates real-world structural inequalities.

Research Questions

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* represent structural violence and its impact on marginalized bodies?
2. In what ways does Necropolitical power manifest in the novel, shaping life, death, and social exclusion?
3. How are guilt and responsibility displaced from state institutions onto vulnerable individuals?
4. What forms of ethical resistance or community solidarity emerge in response to systemic oppression?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides a theoretically integrated reading of contemporary South Asian fiction, connecting literary narratives to social, political, and ethical frameworks (Galtung, 1969; Mbembe, 2003). Furthermore, it contributes to postcolonial literary studies by highlighting how marginalized bodies are subjected to both structural violence and Necropolitical governance. Moreover, the research demonstrates the ethical relevance of literature in understanding power dynamics, responsibility, and survival in contexts marked by systemic oppression. Thus, it offers insights for scholars of literature, postcolonial theory, and political sociology.

Limitations of the Study

This study, Nevertheless, has certain limitations:

- The research focuses solely on *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, which may restrict the generalizability of findings to other South Asian texts.
- While structural violence and necropolises provide robust frameworks, other theoretical lenses (e.g., intersectionality, feminist theory) are only briefly referenced.
- The study relies exclusively on textual analysis and secondary sources, which may overlook empirical data or lived experiences beyond the literary representation.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a critical and original perspective on the intersection of structural violence, Necropolitical power, and literary representation.

Originality and Novelty

Importantly, this research is original because it combines structural violence theory (Galtung, 1969) and Necropolitical theory (Mbembe, 2003) to analyze a contemporary South Asian novel—a combination rarely applied in literary studies. Additionally, it foregrounds the ethical displacement of guilt from institutions onto marginalized bodies, a nuanced dimension of power that existing scholarship has largely neglected. Consequently, this study provides a novel contribution by integrating political, ethical, and literary analysis, highlighting how fiction exposes the systemic dimensions of harm while suggesting potential pathways for ethical reflection and resistance (Roy, 2017; Spivak, 1988).

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Literature Review

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* emerges as a compelling literary site for examining structural violence, a concept that foregrounds how harm is produced not through isolated acts but through social, political, and economic arrangements that systematically deny marginalized groups access to dignity, security, and basic needs. In particular, structural violence operates subtly through institutions, policies, and cultural norms, yet its effects remain deeply inscribed on vulnerable bodies. Within postcolonial literary studies, scholars have consistently shown how narratives from formerly colonized regions expose the enduring legacies of imperial power, revealing how colonial histories continue to shape contemporary inequalities and modes of suffering (Parashari, 2015). For instance, critical readings of Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* demonstrate how ecological devastation intertwines with class, gender, and power, portraying both land and body as sites of exploitation that reflect broader sociopolitical realities (Koban et al., 2025). Similarly, African postcolonial literature has been read as contesting the double expropriation of nature and human life under colonial planning and extractive capitalism, where urban spaces become zones in which environmental degradation intersects with social exclusion (Li, 2025). In this way, Roy's novel participates in a broader postcolonial tradition that exposes how institutionalized harm is normalized and rendered invisible.

Moreover, Roy's work aligns with South Asian narratives that depict individuals grappling with the psychological and emotional costs of conforming to social norms shaped by colonial residues and neoliberal aspirations, often at the expense of personal autonomy and ethical agency (Arora & Bose, 2025). At the same time, postcolonial criticism emphasizes how such texts foreground the *afterlives of imperialism*, revealing fractured identities shaped by historical trauma, cultural hybridity, and linguistic resistance (Parashari, 2015). As a result, literary representations of embodied suffering function not merely as depictions of victimhood but as critical interventions that articulate resistance against entrenched systems of domination. Consequently, the suffering body in postcolonial fiction becomes both an archive of violence and a potential site of ethical critique.

Building on this framework, the concept of necro-politics, as articulated by Achille Mbembe, offers crucial insight into how sovereign power extends beyond governance to determine who may live, who must die, and whose lives are considered grievable. In Roy's narrative, necropolitical power is evident in the differential valuation of lives, particularly those of Muslims, Dalits, queer subjects, and Kashmiri civilians, whose existence is marked by precocity and disposability. This representation resonates with scholarship examining how postcolonial literature engages with the politics of life and death in contexts shaped by historical trauma and ongoing conflict (S, 2025). Furthermore, literary studies highlight how gendered dimensions of exploitation intersect with environmental degradation and state violence, disproportionately affecting women and indigenous populations while reinforcing hierarchical power structures (Pradhan, 2025). In many postcolonial contexts, the state—often operating through inherited colonial frameworks—functions as a central mechanism of control, regulating bodies through surveillance, militarization, and legal exceptionalism (Bibi et al., 2025). Thus, Roy's novel can be read as a sustained critique of necropolitical governance that renders certain lives invisible, expendable, or unworthy of mourning.

In addition, necropolitical logic extends into processes of dehumanization, whereby individuals are stripped of social recognition and ethical value. Literary analyses of alienation, such as readings of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, demonstrate how characters become mechanized figures within consumerist or bureaucratic systems, illustrating how rejection and othering precede disposability (Khaliullina & Makarova, 2025). Similarly, Roy's portrayal of marginalized characters' reveals how

dehumanization facilitates violence by making suffering appear normal or inevitable. Accordingly, necropolitical power not only governs death but also structures everyday life through abandonment, exclusion, and symbolic erasure.

Crucially, this study also foregrounds the displacement of guilt as a key mechanism through which institutional authority is preserved. Postcolonial literary criticism frequently exposes how states and dominant systems rationalize violence while deflecting responsibility onto the very communities they harm. For example, analyses of political and legal discourse show how laws designed to protect citizens can function instead as tools of exclusion and control, maintaining existing power hierarchies (Melo Ascencio, 2024). Likewise, environmental justice scholarship reveals how corporations and governments externalize ecological and social costs onto marginalized populations while sustaining an appearance of moral legitimacy (Chowkwanyun, 2022). In this context, colonial exploitation and neo-colonial militarism often transform landscapes into wastelands, with suffering reframed as collateral damage or individual failure rather than institutional wrongdoing (Qasmi & Akram, 2024). Roy's novel vividly illustrates these dynamics by centering the lived experiences of those who absorb systemic harm, thereby exposing how guilt is displaced from power structures onto vulnerable bodies.

Nevertheless, despite the pervasiveness of structural violence and necropolitical power, Roy's narrative also gestures toward ethical resistance and alternative community formations. Postcolonial literature has long served as a space for reclaiming silenced voices through narrative innovation, cultural memory, and linguistic subversion (Parashari, 2015). In particular, resistance often emerges through every day acts of solidarity, storytelling, and the preservation of alternative epistemologies that challenge dominant modes of knowledge (Arora & Bose, 2025; Jindal et al., 2025). Studies of environmental and indigenous narratives further demonstrate how non-anthropocentric worldviews and communal ethics offer counter-discourses to Extractivism development models (Singh & Singh, 2024; Kumar, 2024). Moreover, alternative communities formed around shared experiences of marginalization can function as ethical spaces that resist necropolitical abandonment, even if such resistance remains fragile or provisional (Hunstein, 2025).

In conclusion, this literature review establishes a robust interdisciplinary framework for analyzing *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* through the lenses of structural violence and necropolitical power. By synthesizing insights from postcolonial theory, environmental justice, and necropolitical critique, this study positions Roy's novel as a powerful ethical intervention that exposes embodied suffering, displaced guilt, and selective grievability while also illuminating moments of resistance and collective care. Ultimately, this approach underscores the capacity of contemporary fiction not only to reflect systemic inequalities but also to challenge the moral failures of postcolonial governance.

Research Gap

Although *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* has generated substantial critical attention for its engagement with marginality, state violence, caste oppression, gender nonconformity, and postcolonial nationalism, a significant gap persists in the existing scholarship. Most studies approach Roy's novel through isolated thematic lenses—such as subaltern studies, trauma theory, feminist resistance, or political dissent—without sufficiently examining how violence operates structurally and systemically rather than episodically. In particular, while scholars have addressed individual suffering and spectacular moments of brutality, there remains a lack of sustained analysis of how structural violence is normalized, routinized, and diffused across institutions, thereby rendering oppression invisible and unaccountable.

Moreover, although recent criticism has begun to invoke necro-politics—especially in relation to Kashmir, communal violence, and state-sanctioned death—these readings often treat necropolitical

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power as a static condition of sovereign control, rather than as a dynamic process that shifts blame onto bodies while absolving systems. As a result, the paradox central to Roy's narrative—where victims are blamed, criminalized, or rendered disposable while institutions remain morally unmarked—has not been adequately theorized. The metaphorical displacement of guilt from the system to the body thus remains critically underexplored.

Furthermore, existing scholarship rarely brings structural violence (Galtung) and necropolitical theory (Mbembe) into a sustained dialogic framework when reading Roy's text. Consequently, the ways in which law, bureaucracy, surveillance, militarization, and media discourse collaborate to produce *slow death,* social abandonment, and ethical numbness are often discussed separately rather than as interlocking mechanisms of power. This analytical fragmentation limits our understanding of how Roy's novel exposes violence not merely as an outcome of authoritarian rule but as a carefully engineered condition of governance in postcolonial India.

Additionally, while *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* foregrounds bodies marked by caste, gender, religion, and political dissent, scholarship tends to emphasize identity-based suffering without sufficiently interrogating how these bodies become sites where state guilt is displaced and erased. In contrast to Kafka scholarship—where recent studies have begun to examine the failure of escape and the paradoxical logic of power—Roy's novel has not yet been fully explored as a narrative where resistance exists alongside the structural impossibility of justice, and where ethical responsibility is systematically deflected.

Therefore, a critical gap exists for a study that moves beyond representational accounts of violence to examine how blame is individualized while guilt is institutionalized and concealed. There is a pressing need for a reading that conceptualizes Roy's novel as a critique of structural violence and necropolitical power operating through legal rationality, bureaucratic delay, militarized sovereignty, and moral displacement. Addressing this gap will not only deepen understanding of Roy's political aesthetics but also contribute to broader debates on postcolonial governance, ethical responsibility, and the mechanics of contemporary state power.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive textual analysis approach to examine Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) as a critical literary intervention into structures of violence, power, and ethical resistance. Qualitative literary analysis is particularly suited to this research as it enables close engagement with narrative strategies, symbolic representations, and discursive formations through which structural violence and necropolitical power are articulated in the text (Creswell, 2013). Rather than seeking generalizable claims, the study aims to produce contextually grounded, theoretically informed interpretations that illuminate how fiction interrogates real-world socio-political conditions.

The research is exploratory and analytical in nature, positioning the novel as a cultural text that reflects, critiques, and destabilizes dominant institutional narratives surrounding nationalism, citizenship, and disposability. This design aligns directly with the study's objectives of examining embodied suffering, the displacement of guilt, and the emergence of ethical resistance within oppressive systems.

Corpus and Text Selection

The primary corpus for this study is Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The novel is selected due to its explicit engagement with marginalized communities—Hijras, Dalits, Muslims, Kashmiris, and political dissidents—and its sustained critique of state violence, militarization, and bureaucratic indifference. Key narrative episodes, character arcs, and spatial sites (such as graveyards,

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detention zones, and abandoned urban margins) are purposively selected for analysis because they foreground the intersection of body, power, and institutional control.

Supplementary materials include Roy's non-fiction essays and interviews where relevant, used cautiously to contextualize—but not override—the literary analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis is guided by an integrated theoretical framework drawing primarily on Structural Violence Theory, Necropolitical Theory, and Critical Postcolonial Ethics. This triangulated framework allows the study to examine how harm is normalized, how death is politically managed, and how responsibility is systematically displaced.

Structural Violence

The concept of structural violence, as theorized by Johan Galtung (1969) and later developed by Paul Farmer (2004), forms a central analytical lens. Structural violence refers to social arrangements—economic, political, legal, and cultural—that systematically disadvantage certain groups, producing suffering without a single identifiable perpetrator. In Roy's novel, violence is not limited to spectacular acts of brutality but is embedded in everyday bureaucratic practices, spatial segregation, and institutional neglect.

This framework enables the study to analyze how marginalized bodies become sites where violence is slow, cumulative, and normalized, by foregrounding the displacement of blame from institutions onto individuals.

Necropolitical Power

Achille Mbembe's (2003) theory of necro-politics is employed to examine how sovereign power determines who may live and who must die. Unlike bio-politics, which focuses on the management of life (Foucault, 1978), necro-politics foregrounds zones of death, abandonment, and social non-existence. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, necropolitical power manifests through militarized governance, counter-insurgency practices, and the systematic rendering of certain lives as un-grievable.

This framework directly informs, by analyzing how state power produces differential valuations of life, particularly in conflict zones and among religious and sexual minorities.

Guilt, Responsibility, and Ethical Resistance

Drawing on postcolonial ethics (Spivak, 1988; Butler, 2009), the study examines how guilt and responsibility are displaced from state institutions onto vulnerable bodies, who are framed as deviant, disposable, or culpable for their own suffering. Judith Butler's concept of grievability is particularly useful in interrogating whose deaths are publicly mourned and whose are erased.

Simultaneously, the framework allows for the identification of ethical resistance, understood not as grand revolutionary acts but as fragmented, relational, and provisional forms of solidarity. Informal communities, shared mourning, and alternative kinship structures are read as modes of resisting necropolitical erasure.

Method of Analysis

The study employs thematic textual analysis informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The analysis proceeds in three stages:

1. **Close Reading**: Detailed examination of narrative language, metaphors, character positioning, and spatial representations related to violence, death, and marginality.
2. **Thematic Coding**: Identification of recurring themes such as embodied suffering, bureaucratic cruelty, necropolitical abandonment, guilt displacement, and ethical resistance.

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3. **Theoretical Interpretation**: Interpreting these themes through the integrated theoretical framework to reveal how literary form and political critique intersect.

This methodological approach ensures coherence between textual evidence, theoretical insight, and the study's stated objectives.

Ethical Considerations

As this research is based on textual analysis of published material, it does not involve human participants. However, ethical responsibility is maintained by avoiding reductive readings of marginalized identities and by engaging critically yet respectfully with representations of trauma, violence, and suffering. The study remains attentive to the political implications of interpretation, particularly when dealing with real historical and ongoing conflicts.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to a single literary text, which may restrict the broader generalizability of its conclusions. However, this limitation is intentional, as the depth of analysis allows for a nuanced exploration of structural violence and necro-politics within a specific postcolonial context. Future research may extend this framework to comparative studies across South Asian or global postcolonial literature.

Discussion/Analysis

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* represents structural violence not as an abstract socio-political condition but as a lived, embodied reality inscribed upon marginalized bodies. Structural violence, as theorized by Galtung (1969) and Farmer (2004), operates through institutions and social arrangements that produce harm invisibly and continuously. In Roy's narrative, this harm manifests through poverty, gender nonconformity, religious persecution, and militarized governance; moreover, it is experienced most acutely by those whose bodies already exist outside normative frameworks of citizenship.

Anjum's body, marked as intersex and later as a Hijra, becomes an archive of cumulative violence. She notes*, I was born twice… once as a baby, and once as a Hijra* (Roy, 2017). This doubling of birth signifies not rebirth but social exclusion; furthermore, it reflects how marginalized identities are forced into alternate modes of existence due to systemic denial of belonging. Rather than offering protection, state institutions exacerbate Anjum's vulnerability, thereby confirming that violence is not incidental but structural.

Similarly, the massacre in Gujarat and the persecution of Muslims reveal how violence becomes routinized through ideological normalization. Roy writes, *The riot had become a festival* (Roy, 2017), a line that underscores how mass violence is transformed into a socially sanctioned spectacle. Besides exposing physical brutality, the novel illustrates how structural violence legitimizes itself through communal rhetoric, thereby erasing accountability while intensifying bodily harm.

The novel, thus, demonstrating that structural violence functions through slow, normalized processes that render marginalized suffering ordinary, expected, and unremarkable.

While structural violence explains the conditions of suffering, Achille Mbembe's (2003) concept of necro-politics elucidates how power actively decides who may live and who must die. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, necropolitical power is most visible in the militarized spaces of Kashmir, where life exists under constant threat of erasure. Here, sovereignty is exercised not through care but through the calculated exposure of populations to death.

Roy describes Kashmir as a space where *Death flies in, death flies out* (Roy, 2017), emphasizing the omnipresence of lethal force. The repeated disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and mass graves illustrate how certain populations are rendered disposable. Moreover, the state's refusal to

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acknowledge these deaths reinforces what Butler (2009) terms *un-grievability*—lives that are not publicly mourned because they never fully counted as lives.

Musa's transformation from lover to insurgent is particularly revealing. His body becomes a target precisely because it resists assimilation into the state's narrative. Roy observes, *In Kashmir, violence had become a language* (Roy, 2017). Therefore, necropolitical power does not merely kill; it disciplines, silences, and erases through sustained exposure to death.

One of the novel's most powerful critiques lies in its exposure of how guilt is displaced from institutions onto vulnerable individuals. State violence is repeatedly framed as necessary, defensive, or accidental; meanwhile, marginalized bodies are blamed for provoking their own suffering. This displacement allows institutions to preserve moral authority while perpetuating harm.

Tilo's surveillance and criminalization exemplify this process. Her association with Musa renders her suspect, despite her lack of formal political affiliation. Roy notes that the state *did not need proof, only suspicion* (Roy, 2017). Thus, guilt is constructed discursively rather than legally; furthermore, it becomes attached to bodies that resist easy classification.

Likewise, Dalit and Muslim characters are positioned as inherently culpable within nationalist discourse. Their deaths are framed as unfortunate but necessary collateral damage. As Roy bitterly remarks, *Some people were never meant to be alive in the first place* (Roy, 2017). Otherwise stated, the system absolves itself by redefining victims as threats. This mechanism directly addresses by revealing how institutions displace responsibility downward, ensuring that violence appears inevitable rather than engineered.

Despite the overwhelming presence of violence, Roy's novel does not abandon the possibility of ethical resistance. However, such resistance is neither heroic nor triumphant; instead, it is fragile, fragmented, and deeply relational. The Jannat Guest House, built in a graveyard, emerges as a symbolic counter-space where rejected lives find provisional belonging.

Roy writes, *They lived together… not like a family, but like a universe* (Roy, 2017). This community resists necropolitical logic by refusing hierarchies of worth. Moreover, it transforms death—a tool of sovereign power—into a site of care and coexistence. The graveyard, otherwise a symbol of erasure, becomes a living archive of solidarity.

Additionally, acts of care—such as adopting abandoned children or mourning the ungrieved dead—function as ethical refusals of state logic. These gestures may not dismantle power structures; nevertheless, they interrupt the narrative of total domination. Butler (2009) argues that mourning itself can be political; similarly, Roy frames care as a form of resistance that insists on shared humanity.

Finally, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* exemplifies how fiction can function as socio-political critique without reducing itself to propaganda. By embedding theory within narrative, Roy reveals how structural violence and necropolitical power operate at the level of everyday life. Furthermore, the novel refuses closure, mirroring the unfinished struggles it depicts.

Therefore, this analysis demonstrates that literary texts can expose the moral contradictions of modern governance more effectively than policy discourse alone. Fiction, in this sense, becomes an ethical archive—recording lives otherwise destined for disappearance.

Finding/Results

- The novel demonstrates that violence operates not primarily through isolated or spectacular events but through routine institutional neglect, social exclusion, and ideological normalization.
- Marginalized bodies—particularly those of Hijras, Muslims, Dalits, and political dissidents—emerge as primary sites upon which structural violence is enacted and sustained.

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- Embodied suffering is represented as cumulative, continuous, and normalized, indicating that harm is systemic rather than accidental or exceptional.
- The narrative reveals that state power asserts control by determining whose lives are recognized, mourned, or rendered disposable.
- Conflict zones such as Kashmir function as necropolitical spaces, where legal frameworks are suspended and death is managed administratively rather than ethically.
- Certain populations are rendered socially dead prior to physical death, reinforcing hierarchical valuations of life and citizenship.
- Institutional violence is legitimized by constructing marginalized individuals as threats, deviants, or instigators, thereby transferring blame away from state structures.
- Surveillance, suspicion, and criminalization replace due process, producing a socio-political climate where guilt is presumed rather than established.
- This displacement of responsibility enables institutions to retain moral and political authority while continuing practices of exclusion and repression.
- Resistance in the novel is non-heroic, provisional, and relational, rooted in everyday acts of care, mourning, and alternative kinship rather than organized political movements.
- Spaces such as the Jannat Guest House operate as counter-necropolitical sites, reclaiming life and dignity within zones otherwise marked for death and erasure.
- Solidarity among marginalized groups challenges dominant narratives of disposability, even though such resistance remains fragile and incomplete.
- The novel demonstrates that fiction can document, critique, and preserve experiences of systemic violence more effectively than official histories or institutional narratives.
- By centering marginalized voices, the text disrupts state-sanctioned accounts and safeguards lives and memories otherwise destined for erasure.
- Literary form itself becomes a mode of ethical resistance, enabling sustained engagement with silenced or un-grieved lives.

Theoretical Discussion of Findings

The findings strongly support Galtung's (1969) and Farmer's (2004) assertion that structural violence is embedded within everyday institutional arrangements rather than exceptional acts of brutality. Roy's narrative illustrates how law, religion, nationalism, and bureaucracy operate as interconnected systems that produce harm indirectly yet persistently. By foregrounding marginalized bodies as the primary sites of suffering, the novel demonstrates how abstract socio-political structures are translated into lived, corporeal pain, thereby affirming structural violence as a crucial interpretive framework for understanding contemporary inequality.

Furthermore, the findings corroborate Mbembe's (2003) theory of necro-politics by revealing how sovereign power functions through the regulation of death rather than the protection of life. In Roy's depiction of militarized spaces such as Kashmir, life becomes contingent, revocable, and administratively managed. Butler's (2009) concept of grievability further clarifies why certain deaths remain publicly unacknowledged, as necropolitical power operates not only through killing but also through selective mourning and deliberate erasure, reinforcing social hierarchies of worth.

The displacement of guilt identified in the findings aligns closely with postcolonial critiques of state violence and bureaucratic rationality. By attributing responsibility to marginalized individuals, institutions sustain a narrative of moral legitimacy while obscuring their own role in producing harm. This mechanism reflects Foucault's (1978) insight that power is most effective when it appears natural,

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inevitable, and self-justifying. Consequently, guilt displacement emerges as a key strategy through which both structural and necropolitical violence are maintained.

Despite the pervasive presence of violence, the findings also highlight the persistence of ethical resistance. Drawing on Butler's (2009) ethics of vulnerability, the analysis demonstrates that resistance materializes through relational practices such as care, mourning, and shared living. Although these forms of resistance do not dismantle dominant power structures, they nonetheless disrupt necropolitical logic by affirming the value of lives deemed disposable. In this way, the novel complicates binary models of domination and resistance, privileging endurance, solidarity, and ethical persistence over revolutionary rupture.

Collectively, these findings underscore the significance of postcolonial literature as a critical site for interrogating contemporary regimes of power. Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* extends postcolonial critique beyond colonial histories to confront modern configurations of surveillance, militarization, and bureaucratic violence. Therefore, this study contributes to literary scholarship by bridging close textual analysis with critical political theory, reaffirming literature's vital role in exposing structural injustice and preserving marginalized histories.

Conclusion

This study investigated the intricate dynamics of structural violence, necropolitical power, guilt displacement, and ethical resistance in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*; moreover, it highlighted how marginalized bodies—such as those of Hijras, Dalits, Muslims, and political dissidents—remain systematically exposed to harm, while institutional mechanisms obscure responsibility, thereby underscoring the broader socio-political challenge of determining whose lives are valued and whose are rendered un-grievable. The analysis revealed several critical insights: structural violence is embedded in everyday institutional practices; furthermore, marginalized bodies become the primary sites of cumulative, normalized harm, highlighting the systemic nature of suffering. Necropolitical power shapes the differential grievability of lives; in conflict zones like Kashmir, legal and ethical frameworks are suspended, and death becomes a mechanism of social and political control. In addition, guilt displacement operates through institutional narratives that label marginalized individuals as threats, thereby preserving state authority while obscuring complicity. Ethical resistance emerges through fragmented, relational acts—care, mourning, and informal community formation—which, although provisional, challenge the disposability imposed by dominant power structures. Besides this, the novel itself functions as a critical archive of structural inequality, documenting experiences that might otherwise be erased, and demonstrating literature's ethical and socio-political significance. These findings carry important theoretical, literary, and socio-political implications; moreover, the study bridges structural violence theory, necro-politics, and postcolonial ethics, showing how embodied suffering and institutionalized death-making intersect, while also illustrating that postcolonial literature functions as an active critique that exposes systemic oppression and insists on the visibility of silenced lives. From a policy perspective, the study suggests that institutions must recognize the human cost of bureaucratic and militarized systems; furthermore, ethical and inclusive governance should prioritize care, rationality and protection of marginalized communities. Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations, as it focuses solely on a single literary text and relies primarily on qualitative textual interpretation; consequently, some real-world correlations remain inferential rather than directly substantiated. Future research could expand the framework by conducting comparative analyses across South Asian or global postcolonial texts, especially those addressing contemporary forms of surveillance, militarization, and digital necro-politics; moreover, interdisciplinary approaches integrating sociology, political science, and human

rights studies could strengthen the understanding of how literary critique corresponds to lived experiences of structural violence, and additional studies could examine ethical resistance strategies in both fiction and non-fiction to map broader patterns of community survival and resilience. In conclusion, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* demonstrates that literature has the power to interrogate systemic injustice, reveal the human consequences of state and institutional violence, and foreground ethical resistance in spaces of vulnerability; moreover, reading literature through frameworks of structural violence, necro-politics, and postcolonial ethics not only illuminates the oppression faced by marginalized communities but also emphasizes the enduring possibility of care, solidarity, and moral accountability. Therefore, Roy's novel stands as both a critical archive and an ethical intervention, insisting that lives deemed disposable remain seen, remembered, and valued.

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