Women and Anti-fascist Resistance in India: Personal Documentation in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

PUJARINEE MITRA

Abstract: Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) is set in India in the period spanning the 20th century to the first decade of the 21st century. It focuses on many instances of state-induced violence in these times like the Gujarat pogroms in 2002, the violence in Kashmir under Indian occupation, and the aggressive snubbing of Maoists in Andhra Pradesh—instances that influence the lives of the characters in many ways. While there has been considerable hesitation in the popular discourse on labelling Hindutva politics as 'fascist', a host of scholarships acknowledge the legitimacy of the term 'fascism' for Hindu nationalist state politics. Anti-fascist resistance can be taken as a lens for examining protests, organizations, and movements on a large number of issues affected by authoritarian state policies that privileges only certain social groups—casteism, Islamophobia, violence on LGBTQ+ community, and so on. These issues also vary in their nature according to geographical contexts in India. I am concerned in this paper with affective anti-fascist resistance by women on problems concerning hijras and Muslims in Delhi and Gujarat and Maoists in Andhra Pradesh—social and geographical coordinates that are relevant in exploring the personal documents of Anjum and Revathy. The questions I want to explore in this paper are: How do the two women characters, Anjum and Revathy, resist fascist master narratives through affects? In what ways do their personal documents function as counter-narratives in this resistance? Through my paper, I shall contribute to the discourse on anti-fascism in India and its intersections with gender and affect studies.

Keywords: Anti-fascist resistance, Women, Affects, Caste, Transgender

Introduction

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is set in India in the period spanning the 20th century to the first decade of the 21st century. It focuses on many instances of state-induced violence in Indian history in these times like the Gujarat pogroms in 2002, the violence in Kashmir under Indian occupation, and the aggressive snubbing of Maoists in Andhra Pradesh—instances that influence the lives of the characters through affects among other ways.

While there has been considerable hesitation in the popular discourse on labelling Hindutva politics as 'fascist', a host of scholarships in the late 20th and 21st centuries acknowledges the legitimacy of the term 'fascism' for Hindu nationalist state politics. Sucheta Mazumdar emphasizes in her article on the similarities between right-wing Hindu politics and German and Italian fascism to establish the justification of calling the former 'fascist'. She says: "The Indian [fascist] movement is deliberately modelled after the

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European fascist movements and although much that is deemed 'Western' is rejected by the Indian movement, the Nazis remain figures of admiration in the writings of the main ideologues." (Mazumdar 1) The argument regarding Hindutva's ideological misfit with European fascism, therefore, does not seem to hold much water. Another article, "Hindutva's Foreign tie-up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence" by Marzia Casolari further illustrates Mazumdar's point by establishing that earlier politicians of the RSS had direct contact with Italian fascist leader, Mussolini, and the group was quite taken in by what they perceived to be a transformation of Italy from a disorderly socialist country to an ordered and prosperous nation. So, the founder of RSS, K.B. Hedgewar, along with some other RSS members, encouraged militarization of Indian society in the model of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany (Casolari 219-21).

Anti-fascist resistance can be taken as a lens for examining protests, organizations, and movements on a large number of issues that are affected by authoritarian state policies that privilege only certain social groups—casteism, Islamophobia, violence on Christian minorities, violence on LGBTQ+ community, and so on. These issues also vary in their nature according to geographical contexts in India. I am concerned in this paper with affective anti-fascist resistance by women on problems concerning *hijra*s and Muslims in Delhi and Gujarat and Maoists in Andhra Pradesh—social and geographical coordinates that are relevant in exploring the personal documents of Anjum and Revathy. The questions I want to explore in this paper are: How do the two women characters—Anjum and Revathy—resist fascist master narratives through affects? What role is played by their personal documents in the form of counter-narratives in this resistance? The personal documents I shall explore include an oral anecdote, a collection of magazines and DVDs, a note and a letter. Through my paper, I contribute to the discourse on anti-fascism in India and its intersections with gender and affect studies.

Sara Ahmed's use of 'affects' in her work as synonymous and interchangeable with emotions is the framework I have used for reading affects within this novel. In an interview between her and Sigrid Schmitz, published in the journal, *FreiburgerZeitschrift fur GeschlechterStudien*, Ahmed says that while 'affect' is generally used to express a "bodily responsiveness to the world", she prefers the word, 'emotion' because along with the function of affect, it also encompasses how "certain kinds of things are given value over time". When she uses the term, 'affect', it is to denote "part of what emotions do." (Schmitz and Ahmed 97)

Brian Massumi in 'The Autonomy of Affect' underlines the importance of affect in right-wing discourses in the US context and that they can be mobilized to counter these discourses as well. In the postmodern era, right-wing ideology pivots not on ideology but on affects, like Reagan's confidence, which is an "emotional translation of affect" (Massumi 103). In the Indian context, with respect to Hindu fascist state policies, Arjun Appadurai's use of the word 'impunity' stands on a par with Massumi's 'confidence'. 'Impunity', in Appadurai's words, denotes "the right to brutalise others with the near guarantee of no legal consequence" (Appadurai 6).

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed examines how different figures of speech cohere with certain affects depending on past histories of their association. After that, these affects function through concealment in those particular figures of speech. Moreover, in sliding and moving from one figure of speech to another, affects are further generated (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 12-13). Mona Lilja claims on the basis of this theory of Ahmed that in case of resistance against fascism, the political institutions against

which one protests are attributed emotional value (such as hate or frustration) which becomes the very foundation of political activities. It directs the bodies protesting and makes them perform political practices. These affects also circulate within the protester's speeches, goading each other to action. Therefore, this emotional value/affective value accrued or emotion/affect generated is performative in nature, drawing bodies towards or away from the object (Lilja 345-46). My question here is how is the affective value generated by the personal documents effective in mobilizing Revathy and Anjum into resisting fascist master-narratives?

Sara Ahmed makes an interesting point in her book while talking about generation of affective value from the movement of words or figures of speech. She says: "The replacement of one word for an emotion with another word produces a narrative" (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 13). Master-narratives in the context of fascist governments have always been actively used as a political tool for purposes of nation-building and their creation works in very similar ways as Ahmed points out. For instance, the use of the word 'danger' in the notorious statement '*Hindus are in danger*' peddled by the Hindu right. 'Danger' is a word that is used as a replacement for all 'non-Hindus' who are perceived to be a threat to the 'Hindu nation'. In circulation of words such as 'danger' to talk about non-Hindus, a narrative is produced that lends value to the affects like fear and hatred of the Other. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz in their article, "National Narratives and their 'Others': Ethnicity, Class, Religion and the Gendering of National Histories'' conceptualize master-narratives as national histories. However, as they argue, the nation might not be the only differential marker in master-narratives. Class, race, ethnicity, gender are also determinants of master narratives.(Berger and Lorenz) In the Hindu fascist regime, there are, therefore, different markers of the circulating master-narratives like caste, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, along with nation. These narratives impart a sense of unity to the 'categories privileged by the narration' which would be Hindu upper and middle caste cis-gender men (Bhattacharya 3). Uma Chakravarti provides an instance of how the Hindu fascist regime engages in a 'reconstruction' of a 'glorious past'— through the visual medium in the form of religious mythological serials on television like *Ramayana* (first aired in 1987) and *Mahabharat* (first aired in 1988). These visual texts are used to assert a national culture that is based on the glamorization and heroization of upper caste Hindu masculinity (in the form of Rama or Arjun) as the true national spirit. (Chakravarti) One can see how gender, caste and ethnicity intersect in such master-narratives.

Constructing counter-narratives to these master-narratives can be an effective tool of dissent, especially those mobilizing affects (to follow Massumi). As Rebecca Adami notes in "Counter Narratives as Political Contestation: Universality, Particularity and Uniqueness", counter-narratives are political acts useful in "unearthing alternative sequences, experiences, and trajectories" to make some neglected subjectivities come forward and let their voices be heard. (Adami 15) Counter-narratives can take many forms and have bases in organizing for different issues like that of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, and so on, as I have mentioned before. In case of the two women characters from Roy's novel that I shall discuss—Anjum and Revathy— gender, religious ethnicity, and caste are the issues on which their counter-narratives revolve.

Anjum

Anjum is a Muslim *hijra*— defined as "transgender and/or transsexual male-to-female [mtf] self-organized into kinship networks with their own religion, symbolic system,

and lifestyle" (Bacchetta 144) — and a resident of Shahjahanabad, Old Delhi. She lives in a house called Khwabgah that shelters transgender women. The fascist master-narratives concerning her are mainly based on gender and ethnicity and mobilize affects like anxiety, hate and pity. Her personal documents include an oral anecdote and a collection of magazines and DVDs that she sets on fire at a point in the story.

In the transgender communities of Delhi, two terms function for the third-gender— *hijra* and *koti. Kotis* remain rooted in heteronormative family networks of procreation and reject the *hijra* desire for castration. This is why they are not considered 'authentic' and do not qualify for blessings and alms (Hall 129). Anjum is a *hijra* as she goes to seek money at social gatherings. A *hijra*'s existence theoretically threatens the territorial integrity of a Hindu nationalist state that draws on masculine valour as the true spirit of Indian subjectivity (we could deduce this from Uma Chakravarti's discussion of the religious mythologies shown on TV). Moreover, *hijras* are a source of anxiety in the Hindu fascist discourse because *hijra* kinship threatens the compulsory heterosexual family set-up that is integral to the Hindu nationalist narrative (Saria). This threat is a construction of the Indian middle class and the British, who also popularized the association of *hijras* with the kidnap of children. The British passed the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871 to arrest 'suspect' groups, among which *hijras* were held responsible for "sodomy, kidnapping and castration". The Indian middle-class (including Hindus and Muslims) encouraged seclusion of *hijras* to particular areas of the city. These attitudes also continued into postcolonial administration (Bacchetta; Hinchy, July 2, 2019). Therefore, it is not surprising that Anjum's parents even seek medical help to enforce a masculine gender on her and avoid social stigma. For instance, Anjum's mother at first does not tell her husband that Anjum was a *hijra*. Instead, she puts all her efforts to bring her up as a boy. Finally when Anjum's father, Mulaqat Ali comes to know that Anjum is not biologically male, he decides to take her to a 'sexologist'. The sexologist warns them that while her vagina can be surgically stitched, her feminine 'tendencies' will remain intact. (Roy 16-17)

The conflict between 'characteristics' and 'tendencies' here mirrors the conflict between her affects (recorded in personal documents) and the affects of fascist master-narratives about Muslims and *hijras*. 'Tendencies' are seen as something internal that refuse to go as opposed to 'characteristics' which are exterior and can be easily manipulated (through medical procedures, in this case). In *Willful Subjects*, Sara Ahmed characterizes willfulness as that which "keep[s] coming up" while an external authority tries to suppress it (Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 2). Mulaqat Ali, as an 'external authority', uses Anjum's masculine 'characteristics' as a directive to suppress her feminine 'tendencies' (which 'keep coming up') and inculcate 'manliness' in its place. As an opposition to this authority, Anjum dreams of being Borte instead of the manly Changez while listening to the romantic tale of Changez Khan and Borte Khatun (Roy 17). Her 'tendencies' are, therefore, an expression of willfulness, in which Anjum wills to embrace her femininity and to enjoy it. She thinks she will be happy when she is free to express her feminine 'tendencies' and live the life of a *hijra* in Khwabgah. "[...] You are all happy here! This is the Khwabgah!" , she says to Nimmo Gorakhpuri, a Khwabgah resident (Roy 23). Even after she has undergone the physical pains of becoming a *hijra,* she tries to find joy in her glamorous life as a famous *hijra* of Delhi.

Sara Ahmed writes that in tending towards something, the subject tends towards happiness; happiness is a 'container' for tendencies (Ahmed 4). The personal documents she collects from this life of celebrity represent not only the social acceptance of her

gender identity but how it is put on a pedestal. Filmmakers, NGOs and foreign correspondents fight over her and she is interviewed and extremely sought after. Such an elevated portrayal of her *hijra*ness generates affects that challenge anxiety, hate and pity from the master-narratives around *hijras*. The documents I refer to here include:

> Three documentary films (about her) Two glossy coffee-table books of photographs (of her) Seven photo features in foreign magazines (about her) An album of press clippings from foreign newspapers in more than thirteen languages including the *New York Times*, the London *Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Globe and Mail*, *Le Monde*, *Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa* and *Die Zeit* (about her). (Roy 57)

However, this fame and adulation is short-lived as another external authority in the form of Dr. Mukhtar intervenes through a fraudulent surgical operation that leaves her with a "patched-together body" and a "rasping" voice that scares everybody. Her celebrity and social adulation start to crumble after that (Roy 29). The magazines, documentary films, press clippings and so on serve as memorials of her past life of willfulness then onwards. Affects like exaltation, happiness and pride reflect through these documents which oppose affects like anxiety, hatred and pity that Hindu fascist narratives generate around *hijras*. They challenge the popular beliefs of *hijras* as kidnappers and deviant sexual beings by glamorizing Anjum's sexuality and her life which are attractive enough to be featured on foreign magazines and photographed on coffee table books. The catch in these 'glossy' counter-narratives lies in the fact that they only portray the marketable parts of her and the adulation stays as long as those parts of her stay.

While the Hindu man is the ideal citizen of the nation, the master-narrative that Anjum and her family, like all other Muslims, have to conform to is RSS' idea of an ideal Muslim—the "Hindu-Muslim"—which Paola Bacchetta defines as a "new invention, designating the hypothetical assimilable Muslim whose conduct would be consistent with Hindu nationalism's nationalist, gender, and sexual normativity" (Bacchetta 151). So, a Muslim who is also a *hijra* would not qualify as a 'hypothetical assimilable Muslim' who sticks to 'gender and sexual normativity'. However, gender-nonconforming individuals are further classified into suitable and unsuitable types in the Hindu fascist imagination. Quoting Jasbir Puar, Rajorshi Das writes: "one must interrogate not only how the nation disallows certain queers but perhaps more urgently, how nations produce and may in fact sanction certain queer subjectivities over others" (Das 196). He says this in context of the Hindu right-wing trans activist, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's memoir. In their memoir, Laxmi, through recounting their personal experience, reflects on the predicament of the community. She represents the *hijra* whose queer subjectivity is sanctioned by the nation as she is Hindu and supports right-wing policies. Laxmi's memoir has been criticized for too much 'celebrification' as she is a popular figure like Anjum, but according to Das' argument, Laxmi's "celebrification is fuelled by her social activism" for the rights of the *hijra* community. (Das 200) Anjum's documents also engage in 'celebrification' of her personal life as a glamorous *hijra* in Delhi. However, as mentioned before, these documents, which serve as memorials for Anjum later, record the commodifiable parts of her life and her identity, engaging in a 'celebrification' that is powered by the needs of an audience feeding on the Hindu fascist master-narrative of Muslim vilification. Therefore, the interviewers make changes to their reports about her paternal family, portraying them as 'conventional Muslims', who are 'cruel' to their gender-nonconforming child (Roy 26). We can see that although 'celebrification' of a *hijra* might work as a counter-narrative against fascist master-narratives of heteronormativity, generating affects like pride and happiness, they can slyly also serve the fascist ethnic master-narrative.

In "Beyond Emasculation: Being Muslim and Becoming *Hijra* in South Asia", Adnan Hossain points out that *hijras* have been found to self-identify with Muslims as "a manifestation of a minority coalitional politics where *hijra* reputedly claim a special status of affinity with Muslims based on their respective subaltern identifications" (Hossain 498). However, an identification with Muslims especially put the *hijras* at a disadvantage with Hindutva conceptions of masculinity, rendering them questionable national subjects. This is because Muslims are seen as both emasculated and hypersexual subjects any way in the Hindutva ethnic master-narrative (Hossain 498). The affects generated around Muslims are the same as around 'bogus asylum seekers' (in Sara Ahmed's words) in the Western nationalist discourses. If fear of the 'other' cannot be contained (as they could be anyone and anywhere), the narrative created through the 'passing by' of the object of fear accelerates fear into anxiety. Hate is also generated against this uncontainable 'other' as they are seen to threaten or 'take away' from the national narrative of homogeneous oneness. In a fascist nationalist discourse, hatred is used as a cohesive force to unify a privileged community (here, the Hindus) against a common enemy who may be definite or not (Muslims or persons with ideologies opposed to the Sangh's) (Ahmed, "Affective Economies", 124-125; 118).

Dibyesh Anand introduces the discourse of security as centered on the 'representations of danger'. In this sense, it is also linked closely with identity politics as how we define ourselves determines how we see the Other. How we see the Other in turn determines how we 'secure' ourselves against them. What Ahmed terms 'anxiety' is an affect similar to Anand's conception of 'insecurity'. When the Other is represented as a danger to the Self, the security discourse prompts "an abstraction, dehumanization, depersonalization, and stereotyping of the Other" so that the Other is "reduced to being a danger and hence an object that is fit for surveillance, control, policing, and possibly extermination" (Anand 155-56). The Muslims are represented in the Hindu nationalist/fascist security discourse as a 'danger' that produces 'insecurity' among Hindus. The response is a bid to exterminate Muslims, as the pogroms of 2002 in Gujarat, depicted in Roy's novel, shows. At the same time, *hijras* also embody sacredness in the Hindu mythological discourse that the Sangh combine propagates as paramount, making the social position of a Muslim *hijra* within the Hindu fascist nation-building exercise very complex.

It is owing to her being a *hijra* that Anjum is granted the opportunity to continue to survive during the Gujarat pogroms. The Hindu extremists, who were about to kill her, say to each other suddenly: "Don't kill her, brother, killing Hijras brings bad luck" (Roy 62). The revered position of the *hijras,* I argue, is owing to their own credit. It is true that Hindu mythology like the epic *Ramayana* has mention of the devotion *hijras* had for Ram and their obedience to his words (mentioned in Roy's novel as well). Even in the *Mahabharata*, another Hindu epic, there is Arjun who disguises himself as a 'eunuch' and participates in weddings and births, legitimizing the ritual contexts in which the *hijra* participate in current times (Bockrath 85-86). However, the criminalization of *hijras* in the British administration powered by the pre-existing prejudices of caste-based Hindu society necessitated their seeking refuge in Hindu religious practices (as Hindus are dominant). Therefore, despite their affinity for Islam, they claim allegiance to Hindu religious traditions as well, even in postcolonial administration to ensure their survival (Taparia 173). Ironically, the fact that they refused to kill her because she was a holy *hijra* filled Anjum with a storm of emotions: "As the days passed, her quietness gave way to something else, something restless and edgy. It coursed through her veins like an insidious

uprising, a mad insurrection against a lifetime of spurious happiness she felt she had been sentenced to" (Roy 56-57).

'Spurious happiness' makes her feel enraged and frustrated and I contend that it is 'spurious' because it is forced. It is generated through a manipulation of her 'willful' embrace of *hijra* identity to fit the fascist narrative about *hijras*. Even though this manipulation saves her life, it happens at the cost of undermining what she thought was quite a rebellious part of herself—her *hijra*ness or her 'tendencies'. Sara Ahmed writes that all subjects 'will' but 'willful subjects' will in the wrong way. The container for all will, right or wrong, is happiness; it is what directs the subject's will. Those who will wrong do not find happiness, those who will right do. (Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 4) An external authority in the form of the fascists malleates her 'will' to serve their ends. Her identity is split and the undesirable part of it—the Muslim ethnicity— is suppressed by placing her within a Hindu mythological context against her will. Therefore, Anjum burns the documents and then smears the ash on herself. Burning the documents is her way of further counter-narrativization by exerting her will to reject the narrative about her *hijra* identity that was constructed to serve the interests of another external authority, the state media. Smearing the ash from the burnt documents on her head and face designates a kind of victory on the master-narratives that benefit Hindu fascism.

The anecdote she recounts to Zainab is another personal document, although not in written form, that functions as an affective resistance against fascist master narratives. Zainab calls it the 'Flyover Story'. In it, Anjum recounts how she and her friends got drenched in the rain and urinated down their legs while returning from a wedding party. She omits that they had been attacked by the police (Roy 33-35). The Section 377 of the IPC (repealed in 2018) had been functioning since before the BJP came to power in the end of the 20th century, along with anti-vagrancy laws, laws against sex work, and laws against kidnapping in order to prohibit sodomy but they also enabled random acts of violence against gender-non conforming people and transgender people who tried to access public spaces. (Shah 8-9; Saria 137) The attitude of the police here is a derivative of the British and upper caste criminalization of *hijras* in the precolonial times. The Flyover Story creates a parallel imaginary space in its retelling of her experience by censoring the existence of any fascist authority. The affects it generates also oppose affects like fear which is produced through fascist narratives about who qualify to be legitimate occupants of certain public spaces (Ahmed 70).

Anjum's fear of the police had made her urinate but she tells Zainab that she urinated because she had to keep walking and she could not keep her bladder in check, which was hilarious for someone as young as Zainab. Through Zainab's happiness, Anjum succeeds in replacing her fear and trauma from the night on the flyover into happiness: "And so, in these ways, in order to please Zainab, Anjum began to rewrite a simpler, happier life for herself. The rewriting in turn began to make Anjum a simpler, happier person." (Roy 34) By rewriting her stories of fear into tales that exhume happiness, Anjum exerts her 'will' and resists affects of fascist master-narratives on the scope of *hijra* mobility.

Revathy

Revathy is a full-time worker in the Communist Party of India (Maoist) who had been operating from the Bastar forest towards the end of her life. She appears only through her personal documents and never as a character in person in the novel. She leaves two personal documents that are both written by her—a note and a letter.

The Communist Party of India (Maoist) has since 2004 opposed the post-independence neoliberal vision of democracy of the Indian government and called for a 'New Democratic Revolution'. This revolution is aimed at establishing a 'people's democratic state under the leadership of the proletariat' that will 'guarantee real democracy for the vast majority of people while exercising dictatorship over a tiny minority of exploiters'. The People's Liberation Army, in which Revathy worked, is their supporting underground group. (Chandra 414) In Andhra Pradesh, a shift from mass mobilization to armed struggle and from tactics that address people's daily problems to the aim to cease state power has become a more widely followed model for the Naxalite/Maoist movement. The party got banned as a terrorist organization in 2009 under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act while the Indian government itself has no other political party who have focused on the rural poor—Dalits and Adivasis who suffer everyday under the oppression of bigger landowners and rich farmers—with 'such single-minded zeal and devotion'. (Harriss 12-14) However, women's exploitation within the party, especially of women belonging to the lower caste, is a well known malady. The top ranks of the party still have men from upper or middle castes. The lower caste (Dalit and Adivasi) women and men are mobilized for the revolutionary ends of the Maoists but they are never promoted to top leadership posts. (Chandra 416) Women's motives to join the party are affected by their poor economic condition and the desire to seek revenge against sexual exploitation by paramilitary (installed by the government to crush the Maoist activists) or men from their own community. Even though there are cases of women leaving the party to become pro-state because of exploitation within the party as well, most women stay back just like Revathy did because the party is a refuge for them and gives them a purpose in life. (Maheshwari 3) This is why Revathy renounces the baby in order to continue to work full-time for the party. The note bears testimony to her dedication for anti-fascist work over the desire for a family: "I cannot look after this child. So I am leaving her here." (Roy 118)

Sara Ahmed in her book, *The Pursuit of Happiness* talks about the figure of the happy housewife as a narrative that has accrued immense affective power in a patriarchal society. Happiness, according to the narrative, is not what the housewife is but what she does. Along with heterosexual intimacy, motherhood is also a crucial part of this happiness. (Ahmed 51-53) Revathy rejects this narrative of the happy housewife (or a happy mother in her case) and identifies her party as her source of happiness. She declares in the note that she was leaving her child because she could not 'look after' her, in other words, renouncing the very care-giving functions of a happy housewife that would supposedly bring her happiness. In embracing her party as her 'Mother and Father', Revathy adheres to an alternate kinship structure like Anjum does, and refuses the heterosexual family structure—the structure that the happy housewife is supposed to inhabit (Roy 425). She even refuses to call herself the baby's mother although she admits to giving birth to her: "[...] I am not her mother. River is her mother and Forest is her father" (Roy 418). In the note, she underlines her unwillingness to follow the narrative of happiness that the police as representatives of a fascist state tried to force on her as they violated her: "Now you go and marry someone. Settle down quietly" (Roy 422). The police officers say these words to enforce her into the happy housewife narrative which would help her stick to the narrative of domesticity 'quietly' instead of raising her voice against fascist oppression in Central India. After all, speaking up and not being 'quiet' would mean causing trouble, questioning the fascist authority (Ahmed 61). In the note, she rejects this model of

happiness outrightly by stating in clear 'unambiguous' words her refusal to play the role of a mother— to 'look after' her baby. Her letter to Dr. Azad Bhartiya—the only part of the novel that talks about her—needs to be examined to gain a broader and deeper context on her affective resistance against fascist forces of the state.

The Indian government began Operation Green Hunt in the Red Corridor (the areas running from Nepalese border through the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh, where Maoist resurgence is active) in 2008. To the center and state governments, the Maoists pose the 'greatest internal security threat to India since independence'. (Chandra 414) This is the reason they have installed the paramilitary as part of Operation Green Hunt to curb the influence of the Maoists and facilitate takeover of forest lands for socio-economic developmental purposes. (Harriss 24) It is important to remember that the government at the centre has not always been BJP, and the Congress Party of India and CPI (M) (when in power) have also implemented fascist policies on the Red Corridor. Ashok Kumbamu writes in his chapter, "The Naxalite Movement, the Oppressive State, and the Revolutionary Struggle in India," that there has been 'mass burning and grouping of villages' in Bastar, a strategy first implemented by the BJP government in 1990-1991, creating and acting through their vigilante group, *Jan Jagran Abhiyan* (JJA). The JJA forced the dalits and adivasis to 'rally against the Maoists, killed many adivasis who they suspected as supporters of the Maoists, raped women, and burned their houses' (Kumbamu 239). Revathy's letter, through its recounting of her biography and the context of her baby's birth, functions as a counter-narrative against the master-narratives propagated by such vigilante groups of the government against the Maoists. While her note resists the affects in the happy housewife narrative the state forces tried to impose on her, her letter resists affects like fear (propagated in master-narratives against Maoists) and disgust (spread through Hindu upper and middle-caste master-narratives against dalits and adivasis). In Revathy's case, her caste and her political affiliation intersect as she becomes the target of violence by the paramilitary.

In her letter, Revathy writes that her mother had to suffer extreme abuse at the hands of her father because she was born with a dark-skin while her mother was of a lighter complexion. Her father's family suspected her of being born of an illegitimate union between her mother and a lower-caste man: "My father's family came to know how black I was. They had that caste and color feeling. They said I was not theirs but a Mala or Madiga girl, not a BC but a SC Schedule Caste girl" (Roy 419). K. Srinivasulu, in his book, documents the differentiation between the Backward Castes (BC) and Scheduled Castes in Andhra Pradesh vis-à-vis their socio-economic position. The former (46.1% of the population) enjoy a superior position and some of them work as weavers, shepherds, toddy-tappers, etc. The latter (17% of the population) are considered inferior and work as leather-workers or in agriculture (Srinivasulu 4-5). What Revathy calls 'that caste and color feeling' is disgust, an affect that generates through the circulation of casteist master-narratives. Revathy might be perceived as an SC but she still is a BC, which is also a lower caste category compared to the Hindu upper and middle castes. The moment of her rape is also marked by the reference to her complexion and its casteist baggage as the police say: "Don't worry Blackie we will let you go" (Roy 422).

Dipesh Chakraborty's "The Dalit Body: A Reading for the Anthropocene" discusses upper caste association of disgust with the lower caste body: "In the Brahmanical scheme of things, the body of the 'untouchable' person was considered untouchable precisely

because it was invested with a certain degree of disgust-arousing significance. This disgust was the emotional source of the marginalization and oppression of the Dalit" (Chakraborty 3). Disgust produces the desire to exclude the object of disgust and the fascist culture of exclusion of minorities and the violence on them have deep roots in disgust. To provide an obvious instance, in Nazi Germany (and rest of anti-Semitic Europe), Jews were depicted as 'hyperbodily, smelly, and hyper-sexual" (Hasan et.al. 4). Projective disgust always involves some form of avoidance of contact but it might vary according to persons or situations. For instance, while Africans were forbidden from using white people's fountains, lunch counters, hotel beds and from sexual contact with white women, white men regularly harassed and sexually abused black women (4-5). When seen in the context of Revathy's rape, one can observe this complex relationship of disgust with physical or sexual violence. The letter documents disgust and as a counter-narrative by Revathy, also her hatred for the child that is produced in the execution of disgust through rape: "When I saw her first I felt very much hatred. I felt that six police fellows cutting me with blades and burning me with cigarettes. I thought to kill her" (Roy 425). She does not kill her only because she is a 'small and cute baby'. Instead of submission, there is hate and she even refuses to keep the baby with her to underline her hate and dissociation from the object of hate.

Revathy also counters the master-narrative of fear against the Maoists but her affects are not biased and blind to the party's flaws. In an authoritarian regime of Hindu nationalism, the demand for protection of rights by the minorities is framed within a narrative of fear—the fear of the minorities taking over the nation that rightfully belongs to the Hindu upper caste. Any progressive social or environmental movements that question this narrative would be treated as a threat (Anand 153-158). This is why the Maoists have been labelled as the 'greatest internal security threat to India', which Revathy opposes in her letter by writing about the party's activities—raising awareness about class inequality and rising poverty in the slums and villages inhabited by dalits and adivasis— and how the paramilitary operated against them in the Red Corridor (Roy 420). Later, as she is concluding her letter, she mentions that the Maoist party has its own problems: "Many times it does many wrong things. Kills wrong people. [...] Party says men and women are equal, but still they never understand" (Roy 425).

Gender discrimination and corruption within the party has been reported immensely in official records even though the party religiously defends its dedication to gender equity and mitigation of women's issues in the villages and slums. Swati Parashar et.al. in their article "(En)Gendering the Maoist insurgency in India: Between Rhetoric and Reality", highlight that women are sometimes abused within the party and their marginalized subjectivity in terms of gender have frequently been overlooked. Women's absence in higher echelons of the party ensures that violence against women within the party are not discussed at higher levels nor does it form the core of their public discourse (Parashar et. al 455). When Revathy tries to talk about her rape to the party leader, he says: "I don't understand this feelings nonsense. We are soldiers. Tell me like a report without emotions" (Roy 424). The refusal to address feelings makes the party come off as an equally masculinist enterprise where women's feelings are reduced to insignificance or 'nonsense'. Therefore, Revathy in documenting her rape with affects like hate, pity for the 'small and cute' baby, terror and alienation when told that women in the party cannot have children, constructs an account against the directives of her party as well.

Conclusion

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is a fictional platform of counter-narratives in which women characters opposing fascist state structures from different parts of the country assemble. Their narratives oppose the master-narratives about their community, gender, caste, and ethnicity, affectively through their personal documents. Hate, fear and disgust are challenged by pride, willfulness, unhappiness, and a host of other emotions. The reader is influenced through these counter-narratives to think of the novel as an alternate space where affects, particularly women's affects, are taken into consideration as a crucial component of both fascist and anti-fascist discourse of nation-building.

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA

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