

# “Things can change in a day”: Rereading Arundhati Roy’s Novels in the Dichotomy of “Change”

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## Abstract

In both of her novels, Arundhati Roy focuses on specific fatal incidents – either deliberate or accidental – which have catastrophically changed the lives of the major characters, including the children. In *The God of Small Things*, the unexpected death of Sophie Mol and brutal killing of Velutha exposed those matrices of oppression which, lying unchallenged apart from jeopardizing Ammu and Velutha, problematized the psychic development of Rahel and Estha. Likewise, in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Anjum’s deadly experience in the Gujarat massacre, the brutal rape of Revathy, and the killing of Miss Jebeen in Kashmir shed light on those dreadful socio-political extremities, which ostensibly beckon an endangered future for the generation to come. Focusing on Roy’s novels, this paper attempts to exhibit how the predominance of the socio-political upheavals has not only changed the lived experience of the child characters in a cataclysmic way, but also exposed them to a world of cruelty, injustice, and futurelessness.

**Keywords:** Roy, Social Oppression, Political Violence, Kashmir, Formidable Future

Change is an inevitable part of human existence. Every socio-economic and political change brings either a positive or negative impact on our lives – while chaos can be turned into harmony, the order can be disjointed in a moment. Arundhati Roy, in her Booker-winning novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997), henceforth *TGST*, reiterates the line “things can change in a day” (32) several times. As the story unfolds, the dichotomy of the word “change” becomes evident. Each time the readers come across this line, they are taken back and forth both to the past – when, amidst subliminal discord and disorder, Rahel and Estha were somewhat happy with their naivety and childishness – and to the cataclysmic present that was dramatically changed after the accidental death of Sophie Mol and the killing of Velutha in police violence. The ambivalence of “change” reverberates with the same tenacity in Roy’s much-awaited second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), henceforth *TMUH*. In *TMUH*, Roy’s narrative exposes those sites of abusive and exploitative power – communal riots, state-sponsored violence, deprivation of



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minority rights, and violation of human rights – which, apart from jeopardizing the lives of the adults, put the future of Zainab, Miss Jebeen the second, and Murugesan’s daughter in danger. Focusing on Roy’s novels, this paper attempts to exhibit how the predominance of the socio-political upheavals has not only changed the lived experience of the child characters in a cataclysmic way, but also exposed them to a world of cruelty, injustice, and futurelessness.

Children occupy a significant place in Roy’s novels. In fact, in both of her novels, Roy has poignantly depicted the myriad psycho-social encounters of the child characters from diverse angles. *TGST*, apart from being an epitome of caste and class exploitation, is also a mirror of the entangled lives of Rahel and Estha. They were dizygotic twins – born from two separate but concurrently fertilized eggs. In the subliminal discord of being reared by a single mother, who has no Locus Standi in family property, and the oblique taunting that they were millstones of the family, the twins in their early childhood were so attached that they were like one soul in two bodies. Moreover, they were playful and happy with their mother’s love and Velutha’s affection. Roy describes them thus:

In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was Forever, Estha and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities. (*TGST* 2)

Their connectedness is exemplified when, touching Estha’s “fever-hot fingers whose tips were as cold as death” (*TGST* 111), Rahel could guess “whatever the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man had done to Estha” (*TGST* 115). Though Rahel had not been there, she could exactly feel Estha’s torment of being molested and the constant fear of being visited by the heinous Orangedrink Lemondrink Man in Ayemenem. Without consuming the same things, Rahel could even describe “the taste of the tomato sandwiches – Estha’s sandwiches, that Estha ate – on the Madras Mail to Madras” (*TGST* 3). Whereas their feelings and memories have coalesced in such a unique way, the death of Sophie Mol and the killing of Velutha changed their lives forever. For them, things changed in a day. After the catastrophe, they were forcefully separated from Ammu and from each other. As a consequence of this split-up, “the two of them are no longer what They were or ever thought They would be. Ever” (*TGST* 3).

Arundhati Roy, both as an author and as a human rights activist, in her fiction and non-fiction, vehemently criticized those matrices of oppression, which violently dehumanized people in the name of caste and religion. The brutal beating of Velutha and his death in police custody exposes the Manichaeanism of law and order system and the hypocrisy of the upper caste people. Unlike his father Vellya Paapen – who endured the “Crawling Backwards Days” of the pre-independence period, when

Paravans “were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas,” (*TGST* 74) – Velutha was a rebel. In his character, there was “a dangerous unwillingness to agree to the ‘performance’ of his own low-caste status” (Tickell 26). His defiant spirit was apparent in “the way he walked. The way he held his head. The quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked. Or the quiet way in which he disregarded suggestions” (*TGST* 76). His confidence and “refusal to be interpellated [or addressed] as a Paravan” (Needham 6) made him an enemy of the touchables and the untouchables alike. Vellya Paapen was afraid of his son because Velutha had a rebellious spirit that was quite unlike a Paravan. Comrade Pillai assumed Velutha as the only potential threat to his political eminence and was secretly plotting with Chacko for Velutha’s expulsion from Ayemenem. At *Paradise Pickles*, “all other touchable workers ... resented Velutha for ancient reasons of their own” (*TGST* 121). Baby Kochamma abhorred Velutha both for his low caste standing as a Paravan and his connection with the communist party – what Baby Kochamma assumes has made him assertive and defiant. However, the world of Rahel and Estha was unaffected from all these caste and class hierarchical hypocrisies. The twins adored Velutha as their best friend. Ammu was aware of her kids’ fondness for Velutha. However, she got “surprised at the extent of her daughter’s physical ease with him. Surprised that her child seemed to have a sub-world [with Velutha] that excluded her entirely” (*TGST* 176). Where the naive twins shared a beautiful “tactile world of smiles and laughter” with Velutha (*TGST* 176), the world of the adults was waiting for an opportunity to eliminate him.

When the affair between Ammu and Velutha was disclosed, and the three children were found missing, Baby Kochamma made the best use of this coincidence to frame Velutha in a rape and kidnapping case. Every opponent of Velutha’s, including the “History’s fiends,” used this opportunity to take his or her revenge. In the FIR, Baby Kochamma reported that Velutha had sexually assaulted Ammu and kidnapped the three children Rahel, Estha, and Sophie Mol to take revenge of his expulsion from the factory. Passos remarks that the Kottayam police were too ready to:

believe Baby Kochamma’s rape story ... The reason why the policemen immediately believed the rape story is that they could not conceive of Ammu’s consent to have sex with an untouchable because, according to common-sensical cultural references, her family is there to grant that she will not be allowed to consent. (97)

Although every accusation against Velutha was a banal lie instigated by Baby Kochamma’s wild imagination, Inspector Mathew, an upper-caste police officer, from his prejudiced point of view, without conducting any in-depth investigation, believed Kochamma’s every word. However, for his safety, before ordering Velutha’s arrest warrant, Inspector Mathew communicated with Comrade K N M Pillai, the communist party leader in Ayemenem, to be sure of whether Velutha has any party backup or he is on his own. Taking the opportunity, Pillai played his part.

He informed Inspector Mathew that “as far as he was concerned, Velutha did not have the patronage or the protection of the Communist Party. That he was on his own” (*TGST* 262-263). Finding Velutha a mere Paravan who had no direct party support, it becomes easy for Inspector Mathew to deal with Velutha with the exact violence and ruthlessness that the upper caste people usually exhibit to the untouchables. Mathew orders the accused to be beaten to near death because Velutha has transgressed the caste boundaries – being an untouchable, he dared to love a touchable woman. But being a member of a voiceless class, he grew concerned about the exploitation of their labor by the upper caste.

When the six touchable police officers found Velutha at the History House (where Rahel and Estha had taken refuge after their boat had been capsized and Sophie Mol was lost in the high tide), they began to beat Velutha violently in front of the twins. In this brutal violence:

His skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheekbones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth, three of which were embedded in his lower lip, hideously inverting his beautiful smile. Four of his ribs were splintered, one had pierced his left lung, which was what made him bleed from his mouth ... His lower intestine was ruptured and hemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity. His spine was damaged in two places, the concussion had paralyzed his right arm and resulted in a loss of control over his bladder and rectum. Both his kneecaps were shattered. (*TGST* 310)

The brutality perpetrated on Velutha exhibits that the police officers’ intention was not to catch the accused Paravan but to “instil order into a world gone wrong” (*TGST* 260) and restore the family pride of the touchables. According to Passos, Velutha’s capture had been executed in such a violent manner because “Velutha represents what touchables fear, the fear of losing privilege, of being dispossessed, of having one’s purity and ascendancy questioned” (*TGST* 96). What Estha and Rahel witnessed on that day was “a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions (this was not war after all, or genocide) of human nature’s pursuit of ascendancy” (*TGST* 309). It was not merely physical torture; it was a naked exhibition of the torments the untouchables endured for centuries.

J A Kearney, in “Glimpses of Agency in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*,” asserts that the exposure of the twins to the violence “damages their personalities irreparably” (127). Witnessing the brutal beating of Velutha by the police officers is a horrendous experience for a seven-year-old boy. The violence perpetrated on Velutha has affected Estha so intensely that even in his youth, he failed to come out of the trauma of his childhood memories. Estha was so traumatized at the beating and death of Velutha that sometimes he was gripped by unnatural quietness. Roy describes:

Once the quietness arrived, it stayed and spread in Estha. It reached out of his head and enfolded him in its swampy arms. It rocked him to the rhythm of an ancient, fetal heartbeat. It sent its stealthy, suckered tentacles inching along the insides of his skull, hoovering the knolls and dells of his memory; dislodging old sentences, whisking them off the tip of his tongue. It stripped his thoughts of the words that described them and left them pared and naked. Unspeakable. Numb. (*TGST* 11-12)

For Estha, things started to change from the day the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man molested him. The fear of his reappearance deprived Estha of his innocent childhood joy. Estha, after his molestation in Abhilas Talkies, was traumatized by the abuse that gripped him like “the uneasy octopus” that hardly “sank and settled at the bottom of the deep water. Sleeping a dog’s sleep. Ready to rise and murk things at a moment’s notice” (*TGST* 212). The already fragile Estha, being a direct witness of the violence against Velutha, became so paranoid that when Baby Kochamma used him as a token of her acquittal, Estha completely lost his peace of mind. To evade the charges of lodging a false FIR against Velutha, Baby Kochamma was obliged by Inspector Mathew to make any of the twins testify to Velutha’s involvement in their kidnapping. Baby Kochamma chose Estha to manipulate for her purpose. Being threatened by Kochamma that if any of them did not cooperate with the Police, they would have to go to jail along with Ammu for killing Sophie Mol. To save Ammu, Estha conceded to testify. Being blackmailed by Baby Kochamma “what had Estha done? He had looked into that beloved face and said: yes” (*TGST* 32). As a consequence of this false testimony, over the last twenty-four years Estha “had carried inside him the memory of a young man with an old man’s mouth. The memory of a swollen face and a smashed upside-down smile ... of a bloodshot eye that had opened, wandered and then fixed its gaze on him” (*TGST* 32).

After this catastrophic incident, Ammu was forced to leave Ayemenem, Estha was sent back to his father in Madras, and Rahel was left alone in Ayemenem. Ammu, having no *locus standi*, had no voice either to revoke their decision or to do anything in favor of her children. Being separated from his mother and sister, and forced to stay with his drunkard father, Estha was deprived of an amicable childhood and his life changed forever. As Roy remarks, “a few dozen hours ... affect[s] the outcome of whole lifetimes” (*TGST* 32).

The trauma of the death of Sophie Mol chased Rahel from childhood to womanhood (*TGST* 17). As Elizabeth Outka comments,

The “Loss” is alive for Rahel at every moment, following her – and even chasing her – through linear time, from school to school, from childhood to womanhood, a frozen moment and yet one that is perpetually on the move. This static omnipresence appears in a simpler though starker form in the recurring symbol of Rahel’s toy watch, which always shows the same time,

ten to two. The watch itself ends up buried at the site of Velutha’s beating and Sophie Mol’s death, as if recording permanently the moment and the place when time stopped altogether – and simultaneously suggesting that the moment will always be present. (6)

Rahel could hardly tolerate the grief of the separation from her twin brother, Estha. Before she could manage that shock, the news of Ammu’s death brought an unusual change in Rahel’s psyche. In Ayemenem house, Chacko and Mammachi provided her with “the care (food, clothes, fees), but withdrew the concern” (*TGST* 17). Enduring this carelessness when Rahel had developed a good understanding with McCaslin, a doctoral student from America, she wanted to embrace that love and care. She drifts to marriage “like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge” (*TGST* 18). Rahel sought marriage as an escape from her psychic troubles, with her conjugal life starting in Boston. McCaslin was indeed in love with Rahel. He embraced her, “as though she was a gift ... unbearably precious” (*TGST* 19). Even after being drenched in love and care, Rahel was cold and expressionless in response. Her eyes were always mystified, searching for something as if she were looking for someone “out of the window ... at a boat in the river [for Estha]. Or a passer-by in the mist [for Velutha]” (*TGST* 19). McCaslin could never make sense of that look. What he assumed to have seen in Rahel’s eye “was not despair at all, but a sort of ... a hollow where ... the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other” (*TGST* 19-20). In fact, the emptiness that Estha’s absence has created made her exasperated and despondent towards life. McCaslin was heartbroken by Rahel’s unresponsiveness and gradually “incurred by the confirmation of his own inconsequence, he became resilient and truly indifferent” (*TGST* 19), which eventually culminated in the end of their conjugal relation. Her divorce was as quick as the marriage decision. McCaslin could never fathom Rahel’s agony because,

He didn’t know that in some places, like the country that Rahel came from, various kinds of despair competed for primacy. And that personal despair could never be desperate enough ... It was never important enough. Because ... [i]n the country that she came from, poised forever between the terror of war and the horror of peace, Worse Things kept happening. (*TGST* 19)

After being divorced, Rahel was not engaged in anything significant. She was merely surviving by working at a petrol pump. When she came to know about Estha’s return to Ayemenem, she quits her job immediately and leaves America only “[t]o return to Ayemenem. To Estha in the rain” (*TGST* 20). Having no ambition or goal to achieve, thus, the lives of the twins moved to futurelessness because neither the family nor the society supported them in any way. In fact, Rahel and Estha were not responsible for what happened to them: “[they] are not the sinners. [they] are sinned against. [They] were only children. [They] had no control. They are the

victims. Not the perpetrators” (*TGST* 191). For them, things changed in a day, not in a better but in the worst way.

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (*TMUH*) introduces the readers to an experimental narrative. Somak Ghoshal, in his review, “A Far Cry from the Writer’s Brilliant First,” prefigures *The Ministry* as “a gargantuan handbook to modern India and its injustices” (1). Unlike *The God of Small Things*, her much-awaited second novel is jam-packed with characters. In *TMUH*, telling those individual and collective stories, Roy takes “a panoramic view of violence, injustice, suffering over decades of India’s history” (Ghoshal 1). *TMUH* is shadowed with a pessimistic tone. In this novel, characters, both adult and the young ones, are victims of the wild political ambitions of the idiosyncratic political leaders who want to transform a polymorphous country into a monolithic one. It is an undeniable fact that in India, “[n]o manner of linguistic uniformity or vegetarianism can organically make real the fantasy of a one nation/one people/one religion” (Lahiri). Moreover, the denial of the “congenital diversity” of India retains the perpetual risk of “genocidal catastrophe” for the people categorized as a minority (Lahiri). Amid the rise of such socio-political upheavals, while the present has changed into the mayhem of extreme realities, the predictability of a better future for the children is as hopeless as building castles in the air.

While in *TGST* Rahel and Estha have been the direct victims of violence, in *TMUH*, the child characters get affected indirectly. Depicting the horrendous experience of Anjum, Revathy, and Murugesan, Roy foreshadows a chaotic future for their children. Anjum, a transgender person embodying the tension between opposing forces inside India: man and woman, old and new, Hindu and Muslim” (Bailey), takes us to the “Macondo Madness” that the present-day postcolonial India is. She discovers Zainab, a three-year-old abandoned girl, in a dargah. Anjum adopts this child and rears her as a foster mother. Eventually, their love for each other grows. Anjum was happily living in the Khwabgah, the palace of dreams, until she had her deadly experience in the Gujarat riot in which “around a thousand people were killed, most of them Muslims suffering at the hands of Hindu nationalists” (Acocella). In fact, the madness of the riot and the massacre she witnessed on that day changed her life for good. Being a transgender person (Hijra), she survived the bloodthirsty rioters because they believed that killing a Hijra might bring them bad luck. So they left her untouched. However, her companion, Zakir Mian, could not save himself from the hands of the fanatics. To save herself from the spree of mob violence, she, along with countless Muslim families, took shelter in a mosque. Unlike many, she was fortunate enough to be rescued. Zakir Mian’s eldest son, who “went on his third trip to Ahmedabad to look for his father” (*TMUH* 46), brought Anjum back to Delhi.

After being rescued from Gujarat, Anjum failed to resume her normal life. She was so terrified by her gruesome experience that to accommodate Zainab with the

changed reality of the rise of communal hatred, she forced her to learn the “Gayatri Mantra” so that in mob situations, “they could recite it to try to pass off as Hindu” (*TMUH* 47). Anjum feared that Gujarat could come to Delhi at any moment; hence she forces Zainab to cut her hair off to look like a boy and made her wear boy’s attire for her security. However, all these impositions seemed strange to Zainab, and being scared, she started distancing herself from Anjum. Although Anjum has not encountered any deadly incident like Gujarat in Delhi, she decides to be more cautious about her daughter. In short, whatever she chooses to do for Zainab stems out of fear, uncertainty, and anxiety, which are unavoidably prevalent in the air. After her near-death experience in Gujarat, the future Anjum could anticipate for herself, for Zainab, and all the people of the minority community, is predominantly one that is murderous.

Orphans and abandoned children are the focal point of the narrative of *TMUH*. In the middle of the novel, a foundling in Jantar Mantar becomes the center of all attention. This abandoned child is dramatically taken to the custodial care of Tillotoma and Anjum. Tillotoma names the child Miss Jebeen the Second. Although the mystery of Zainab’s identity is not disclosed until the end of the novel, a letter brought by Azad Bharatiya traces out the mother of Miss Jebeen the Second as Revathy. The letter unfolds the horrifying experience of Revathy who writes, “I am Revathy, working as a full-timer with the Communist Party of India (Maoist). When you receive this letter, I will be already killed” (*TMUH* 417). Therefore, it is apparent that they were holding the last words of a mother. This letter opens up the horrible reality of the group she was part of and discloses the reasons behind her child’s abandonment in the chaos of Jantar Mantar.

In her depiction, Roy uses deadly events as exploratory ones to investigate the hypocrisies and injustices responsible for premeditated killings, and massacres. As a mouthpiece of her community, Revathy boldly expresses the horrifying condition of her people, the Tribals and the Adivasis, who became the direct victims of the government’s project “Operation Green Hunt.” She illustrated this project as a war against people. Revathy kept describing the forest scenario, saying that because of the infiltration of the police and armed forces, her living place became a war zone where thousands of police and paramilitary members occupied their houses and land. Regarding the infiltration of the government forces, a victim’s account states that the police and armed forces were “[k]illing Adivasis, burning villages ... [because] they want Adivasi people to vacate forests so they can make steel township and mining” (*TMUH* 421). From her letter, it becomes evident that to resist the oppression of the security forces and get back their arable lands, Revathy joins the People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA), a blacklisted communist group in India.

Revathy was educated; therefore, instead of being involved in the direct armed struggle, she had been working as an informer for PLGA. One day she was captured



and eventually brutally gang-raped by six police officers. Roy, in *TMUH*, gives a vivid and disturbing description of this violence perpetrated on Revathy. These police officers inhumanly brutalized her body to render the message to the other comrades that a similar fate is in store for them. Revathy could escape from police custody but failed to avoid the consequences of that rape. The child of those six men or one started to grow in her womb. She was devastated by the violent sexual and physical torture. The sexual assault perpetrated on Revathy changed the course of her life.

The struggle Revathy and her people were engaged in might have no end except in their complete annihilation. From her own experience, Revathy could predict the future of the child born out of rape violence: as a girl, she might become a victim of such violence too. Revathy did not want her daughter to face the same fate. So, she abandons her in Jantar Mantar where she felt someone from the noble or deprived people gathered there might give shelter to her child and help her survive towards a better future.

The denial of due honor to the life-sacrifice of S Murugesan and the subsequent disfiguration of the statue built for his commemoration blatantly exhibits the dominance and intolerance of the upper caste people. In *TMUH*, S Murugesan, a Dalit from Tamil Nadu, is depicted as an army soldier. He is deployed in Kashmir. In a terrorist attack, his life ends there within a day. The patrolling jeep “he was riding in was blown up on the highway ... He and two other soldiers bled to death by the side of the road” (*TMUH* 317). The death of Murugesan was not a natural one. He died while he was on duty serving his country. Both from religious and national perspectives, his death is noble. However, his village people did not recognize his sacrifice, especially the Vanniyars (who were not “untouchable”). They treated his dead body the way they used to treat him as an untouchable. Hence, they did not allow “the body of S. Murugesan (who was) to be carried past their houses to the cremation ground” (*TMUH* 317). They were even dead against the army’s plan to build “a cement statue of Sepoy S. Murugesan, in his soldier’s uniform, with his rifle on his shoulder, at the entrance of the village” (*TMUH* 318) to commemorate him.

The statue of an untouchable with a weapon seemed threatening to them because they felt it might instigate a revolutionary spirit in the untouchables and pose a danger for them. Therefore, three weeks after the installation of S Murugesan’s statue, “the rifle on its shoulder went missing ... a month later the statue’s hands were cut off ... two weeks after the amputation of its hands, the statue of S. Murugesan was beheaded” (*TMUH* 318). Neither the police nor the local court wanted to pay serious attention to this case because they did not want to enrage the touchable class. Despite the disfiguration of the statue, S Murugesan’s baby, unaware of a similar fate, kept waving at the statue calling it “Appappappappappappappa” (father). Entirely disfigured, “the headless statue remained at the entrance of the village. Though it no longer bore any likeness to the man it was supposed to commemorate,

it turned out to be a more truthful emblem of the times than it would otherwise have been” (*TMUH* 319). The silence and inaction of both the police and the local court authenticates that the distortion of the statue of an untouchable is a legitimate act. This incident also exposes how the upper caste people disregard and mock the contribution of the lower caste people in India. In fact, untouchability is the most oppressive and indomitable institution in India. The practice of untouchability has changed very little since independence,

in spite of social and political movement of B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) and the political and social affirmative action taken by the Indian state for the uplift of the ex-untouchables (now known as Dalits) in the form of the Untouchability Offences Act passed in 1955 followed by the Protection of Civil Rights Act in 1976, the social evil of untouchability exists and persists in Indian society. (Awana 265)

Hence, by the callousness of the legal system and the attitude of the infallibility of the touchables, the untouchables got the clear message that the upper caste will never acknowledge their sacrifice and hard work. While the statue of Murugesan could not escape the brutality of the upper caste people, his progeny is not expected to live in a better world free from exploitations based on untouchability. Murugesan’s mutilated statue foreshadows a similar fate for his daughter and the people he represents. Hence, the Constitutional promises of change to a better world are nothing but a mockery for them and their next generation.

The second half of *TMUH* focuses on the Kashmir crisis. Depicting the gruesome reality of Kashmir, Roy takes readers on a tour of the volatile condition of Kashmir, which, in no time, turns unpredictably violent and deadly. Roy, in her portrayal of Musa Yeswi, depicts the dreadfulness that became an unavoidable reality for the Kashmiris. Musa lost his family in “a horror perpetuated by the Indian army” (Khair). His daughter and wife “died by the same bullet. It entered Miss Jebeen’s head through her left temple and came to rest in her mother’s heart” (*TMUH* 310). That one bullet turned Musa’s world upside down. Oeendriila Lahiri, in her review on *TMUH*, comments, “[t]he stray bullet that casually kills Musa’s daughter has been, over the last 20 years, responsible for swathes of marked and unmarked graves in Kashmir.” Roy stresses too that, in the Kashmir valley, “in every single household something terrible has happened” (*TMUH* 371), which made the crisis of Kashmir a never-ending game of revenge.

Retrospecting on the events that culminated in the death of his daughter Miss Jebeen, and sixteen other people, on the day mourners were carrying to burial the body of Usman Abdullah, a famous university teacher, possible assumptions can be made to understand the sustenance of the crisis in Kashmir. Roy, taking Kashmir as a backdrop of this novel, tried to shed light not only on the possible causes of the involvement of many Kashmiris in the undercover militancy but also on the reasons behind the repressive and often violent standing of the security forces. Musa is a

direct victim of the extremities of both the militant groups and the government's agencies in Kashmir.

The assassination of Usman Abdullah, a secular and progressive Muslim, by an unidentified gunman is a clear indication that “the syncretism of Kashmir that he represented would not be tolerated ... [and] all arguments would be settled with bullets” (*TMUH* 320-321). Because of his open-mindedness, Usman Abdullah “had been threatened several times by the newly emerging hard-line faction of militants who had returned from across the Line of Control, fitted out with new weapons and harsh new ideas” (*TMUH* 320). These militants were obstinately strict to their new rules of intolerance. They openly expressed their controversial views like “Shias were not Muslim” and “women would have to learn to dress appropriately” (*TMUH* 321) to stay in Kashmir. In the face of the rise of such extremist groups and their intermittent militant actions, either against the peace-loving people of Kashmir or against the soldiers of the security forces, keeping normalcy in Kashmir became a major challenge.

Moreover, to tackle those unpredictable situations like suicide bombing, terrorist attacks, or sudden mob violence, the security forces need to stay on high alert all the time. Amid such unpredictability, the slightest miscalculation could result in the death of innocent people, and thus the situation deteriorates. Musa's wife and daughter were killed in such a quagmire. When Musa's daughter was killed on that day, her mother had been holding Miss Jebeen in her lap and standing in the balcony to watch the procession of thousands of mourners who were carrying the dead body of Usman Abdullah. The police opened fire on the procession and both his wife and daughter died by the same bullet. Sixteen others were killed too and the mourning of one death ended with a death toll of seventeen. Thus, both the infiltration of the government forces and the insurgencies of the extremist militant groups, the situation changed in such a catastrophic manner so that in Kashmir, “death was everywhere, Death was everything” (*TMUH* 314).

While the lives of the children are affected by violence on the one hand, the violence against them changes the course of lives of the adults. Those who watched Musa Yeswi burying the dead body of his daughter notice how differently he acted that day: “[H]e displayed no grief. He seemed withdrawn and distracted, as though he was not there” (*TMUH* 344). His life was devastated by that incident. Musa could assume that “[l]ife as he once knew it was over ... Kashmir had swallowed him, and he was now part of its entrails” (*TMUH* 344). The life of Musa changed in a day. As an act of retaliation, Musa joins a militant group named Tehreek, and his fugitive life begins.

Due to the clash between the government forces and the extremist militant groups, Kashmir is never at peace. For Miss Jebeen and the others who died, the language of the bullet has destroyed the possibilities of any peace-making process. For the Kashmiris, the normalcy of life is not a livable experience; rather, normalcy is only a

matter of declaration. Whereas the extremist militant groups with their insurgencies are intensifying the gravity of the situation that has already gone beyond control, the agents of the security forces torturing and mutilating innocent people in the name of peace and order are also adding fuel to the flame which is pushing young minds into militancy. In the midst of such mayhem, with no possibility of having an amicable future either for the present generation or its progeny, in Kashmir, “Death went on. The war went on” (*TMUH* 324) and “[d]ying became just another way of living” (*TMUH* 314).

Eckhart Tolle stresses that “[t]he power for creating a better future is contained in the present moment” (qtd. in Gizzi). Nevertheless, when the present is jeopardized with the persistent threat of class and caste oppression, patriarchal supremacy, socio-political exploitation, religious hatred, state-sponsored killings, denial of minority rights, loss of social security and many such matrices of oppression, the hope for a favorable change is nothing but a mirage. Exposing the child characters to such mayhem, Roy, in both novels, has ascertained that “things can change in a day.” While Rahel’s and Estha’s lives are completely changed on the day of Sophie Mol’s death and Velutha’s killing, Zainab’s, Miss Jebeen the Second’s, and Murugesan’s daughter’s future changed for the worse in the everyday realities of class and caste oppression, and communal hatred.

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