**Intolerance Begets Violence: A Comparative Study of the Novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai**

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Abstract: This research paper attempts to explore the violence due to intolerance in the novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. Intolerance can be classified as social, religious, ethnic, political, cultural and even psychological. It is a rejection of a person or his notions, but unfortunately at present almost every intolerant activity is ending in violence. Nowadays people are unwilling to accept the different views of others; consequently this extreme intolerance is begetting violence in our society. Both the novelists have exposed this type of parochialism, which has no respect for any dissimilar view point. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, whereas Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* throw floodlights on the concept of intolerance and violence, which has turned out to be a focal contemporary issue posing challenges to polity and governance in India. The novelists uncover the social perspective with the help of physical and psychological violence, which is caused by the intolerant behaviour. In order to draw a comprehensive picture both the women novelists have very skillfully deliberated upon the multiple instances of violence that happen due to our narrow-mindedness. Indian society has turned up to be an evident platform of different type of atrocities. When goons take the shape of a mob, they become excessively bigoted and intend to lynch the one who stands opposite to them. Baby Kochamma in *The God of Small Things*, Anjum in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, and the judge in *The Inheritance of Loss* become the victims of intolerance and suffer physical and psychological violence. The present paper is based upon the comparative study of above cited three novels of these two conspicuous novelists.

Keywords: Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, violence, intolerance, physical, psychological.

India is a land of diversity, having people from different religions, languages, races, castes, classes, cultures, colours and ethnicities. We are taught the basic lesson of tolerance and advised to exercise self-control from the very childhood. The concept of tolerance has remained in the books alone, whereas the intolerance occupied the centre stage. Broadly, intolerance can be classified as social, religious, ethnic, political, cultural, physical and even psychological. It is a rejection of a person or his notions, but unfortunately at present almost every intolerant activity is ending in violence. Nowadays people are unwilling to accept the different views of others; consequently this extreme intolerance is begetting violence in our society. Both the novelists have exposed this type of parochialism, which has no respect for any dissimilar view point.

Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, whereas Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* throw floodlights on the concept of intolerance and violence, which has turned out to be a focal contemporary issue posing challenges to polity and governance in India. The novelists uncover the social perspective with the help of physical and psychological violence, which is caused by the intolerant behaviour. In order to draw a comprehensive picture both the women novelists have very skillfully deliberated upon the multiple instances of violence that happen due to our narrow-mindedness. Indian society has turned out to be an evident platform of different type of atrocities.

From the cave era to the computer age, human beings have been toiling hard to establish their identity and individuality. Just like our finger prints, we are bound to have the ideas that are different from each other. Accepting and rejecting the views of others with grace is a vital sign of a civilised person. But it has become a rare phenomenon these days, as almost every case of intolerance is giving birth to a violent response. Milan Obaidi along with his co-authors opines that likeminded people swell into a group and those clusters desire to clutch the individuals having conflicting interests. “It is possible that the very perception that another group sees one’s own group as a threat to their culture will in itself mobilize people to defend their own culture, with violence if need be” (Obaidi 2). When goons take the shape of a mob, they become excessively bigoted and intend to lynch the one who stands opposite to them. Baby Kochamma in *The God of Small Things*, Anjum in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, and the judge in *The Inheritance of Loss* become the victims of intolerance and suffer physical and psychological violence exercised by such gangs.

Leaving aside the physical torture, Kiran Desai pays more heed to the mental turbulence, which is being practiced by the predators. She gives priority to the psychological violence over the physical one. Her characters undergo perpetual mental tortures, which shatter them to the core. In the first chapter of *The Inheritance of Loss*, Desai introduces such an instance and immortalises it with her matchless narrative skills. Some young boys come to the judge’s house in order to loot his hunting rifles. The judge, his cook and Sai get scared from the self-styled Nepali goons. After robbing whatever is at their disposal, they ask for tea and snacks. Desai knows that physical torture is relatively less harmful in comparison to the mental abuses:

“Say, ‘*Jai* Gorkha,’” they said to the judge. “Gorkhaland for Gorkhas.”

“*Jai* Gorkha.”

“Say, ‘I am a fool.’”

“I am a fool.”

“Loudly. Can’t hear you, *huzoor*. Say it louder.”

He said it in the same empty voice.

“*Jai* Gorkha,” said the cook, and “Gorkhaland for Gorkhas,” said Sai, although they had not been asked to say anything.

“I am a fool,” said the cook. (*Inheritance* 7)

The humiliation that has been generated for the judge is too much for him. He has neither expected nor faced this type of insult in the whole span of his dignified life. “It was an awful thing, the downing of a proud man. He might kill the witness” (8). Facing embarrassment of reciting those unwanted slogans in front of the subordinates splinters his ego. The insurgents have developed a wrong impression that by forcing people to recite the slogans of their choice, they could induce the same feeling in the hearts of victims. Even “The Metal-Box watchman had been beaten, forced to repeat “Jai Gorkha” (279). The rebels intend to attack their mindset in order to capture their mental domain. Here, Desai presents certain remarkable instances where she exposes social intolerance of the Gorkha clan against the non-gorkhas.

Quite similarly, Arundhati Roy has also dealt with psychological violence due to intolerance in her both novels. In *The God of Small Things*, some protestors make Baby Kochamma recite ‘Inquilab Zindabad’ just like the Nepali looters force the judge to speak out ‘JaiGorkha’. Humiliation multiplies when it is being witnessed by the associates. As the judge gets more ashamed in front of his cook and grand-daughter Sai, in the same way Baby Kochamma’s disgrace gets multifold in the presence of Chacko, Ammu and Twins. Their car gets jammed amongst a huge crowd of protestors. “The man with the flag turned his attention to her. She was looking down at the floor of the car. Like a coy, frightened bride who had been married off to a stranger” (Roy, *God* 80). They make fun of Baby Kochamma by addressing her with different names. She gets terrified and becomes a laughing stock for the passengers inside the car and the crowd outside:

The man like a knot gave Baby Kochamma his red flag as a present. ‘Here,’ he said. ‘Hold it.’

Baby Kochamma held it, still not looking at him.

‘Wave it,’ he ordered.

She had to wave it. She had no choice. It smelled of new cloth and a shop. Crisp and dusty. She tried to wave it as though she wasn’t waving it.

‘Now say *Inquilab Zindabad*!’

*Inquilab Zindabad*,’ Baby Kochamma whispered.

‘Good girl.’

The crowd roared with laughter. (80)

Just like the judge, Baby Kochamma also tries to save her face by becoming busy. This mortification brings a very adverse impact upon her personality and she desires to get rid of this disgrace by punishing Ammu and her twins in the later part of the novel. When Baby Kochamma comes to know that Velutha was also amongst the march “She began to hate him” (82). Roy uses the psychological violence, which Baby Kochamma suffers as a major tool to exhibit various other types of violence in the novel. Here, a highly significant point peeps out that these meek individuals are helpless to confront with the mighty groups, hence the intervening of social institutions becomes mandatory to curb violence. “In larger societies, social institutions must arise to control violence. No society eliminates violence; at best, violence can be contained and managed” (North 58). The government should come forward to restraint the violent intolerants, as these kinds of atrocities perturb the mental equilibrium of the victims.

Continuing with the same kind of psychological violence in her second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy presents Anjum as a victim of a crowd of self-styled protectors of India. Roy canvases a noteworthy blend of religious and political intolerance when Anjum and Zakir Mian get caught in the riots. Religion and politics are intermingled in such a tight manner that it seems to be nearly impossible to separate them from each other. “Saffron men with saffron smiles” (Roy, *Ministry* 61) kill Zakir Mian along with a huge number of Muslim men and women. Anjum has seen and suffered the brutality. She has witnessed “how they had folded the men and unfolded the women” (61). Anjum being a “Hijra” (62) is expected to get a different type of torture at the hands of “saffron parakeets with steel talons and bloodied beaks” (62). Anjum was completely shattered after seeing this miserable massacre:

Thirty thousand voices chimed together, mimicking Ustad Kulsoom Bi’s Birbal:

*Ai Hai! Saali Randi Hijra! Sister-fucking* Whore Hijra. Sister-fucking Muslim Whore Hijra.

Another voice rose, high and anxious, another bird:

*Nahi yaar, mat maro, Hijron ka maarna apshagun hota hai*.

Don’t kill her, brother, killing Hijras brings bad luck. (62)

She is not killed, but suffers the same kind of humiliation, which is being experienced by Baby Kochamma in *The God of Small Things* and the judge in *The Inheritance of Loss*.

In a multicultural society people will be having common values as well as diverse interests. When the social beliefs differ then we require a sense of comprehension to respect the opinion of others. The responsibility of the government increases many fold in a multi-religious country like India. The authority should safeguard the interests of majority and minority communities quite equally. If a group feels that the government is helpless to watch their interests, they are more prone to choose the path of violence against the government and the beneficiary community. Those groups consider it as their duty to protect their community with the help of their own muscle power. They show their bigoted attitude towards a transgender also. Finally, the so called protectors of their religion spare Anjum’s life, but enhance her disgrace:

So they stood over her and made her chant their slogans.

*Bharat Mata Ki Jai! Vande Mataram!*

She did. Weeping, shaking, humiliated beyond her worst nightmare.

Victory to Mother India! Salute the Mother!

They left her alive. Un-killed. Un-hurt. Neither folded nor unfolded. (62-63)

Social conflict is a double edged sword, it can either unite people against a common foe or it has the capacity to make people enemy of each other. Conflict arises from the clash of interests and due to lack of tolerance people choose the path of violence. Rakhee Kalsekar in the beginning of the fifth chapter namely ‘Social Conflicts and Social Control’ of her book entitled *Key to Sociology* give a detailed description of social conflicts amongst people and organisations. The clash between the dominant group and minorities lead to social confrontations:

Social conflict can best be described as a confrontational stance among public actors. Social actors can be reduced to “social forces” representing these actors. Variables that can exert social force might be the power of banks, labor, the state, private gangs, corporate power or religious/ideological power. All of these can exert force and become actors in social conflict. (Kalsekar 113)

Social conflict comes to the forefront when minorities intend to possess the power and in order to have social control they exhibit violence. If they can’t kill the opponents, they at least humiliate them, which is a more serious category known as psychological violence.

Arundhati Roy just like her counterpart Kiran Desai advocates that psychological violence in the form of humiliation shatters the victim from inside as well as outside. The consequences of mental torture prove to be eternal and fatal. One of the main reasons of such intolerance is prejudice temperament, which leads to a blind violence. The insurgents develop an unfavourable opinion of the opponent without any thoughtful analysis. Those preconceived notions label the rest of the people as their foes and they start developing hatred for the people other than their own communities. This predisposition to dislike others make them bias and most of the times their inner hatred outflows when they are in the groups. Intolerance breeds intolerance and the same does apply to the violence.

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