

POLITICO-LITERARY RESPONSE TO TERRORISM: A STUDY OF ARUNDHARI ROY'S *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

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The Kashmir issue has been an apple of discord between India and Pakistan since the partition of the country in 1947. People have suffered due to politics which should otherwise have been instrumental in solving the conflict, mainly because of the intervention of terrorism. The Booker Prize awardee Arundhati Roy's latest novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* has appeared after a gap of 20 years and touches upon this problem of the Indian subcontinent. On Booker's longlist again, this novel straddles the twin domains of politics and literature in that it airs the writer's political philosophy in her powerful narrative couched in rich language and a mocking style. My paper deconstructs the strategy adopted in the novel and also administers it a reality check which shows the writer's courage of conviction even as the narrative throws up more questions than it answers.

Keywords: Terrorism, Partition, Narrative, Deconstruction.

Introduction

The long-awaited second novel from Arundhati Roy has finally appeared after a span of 20 years, under the title *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. What we saw after the appearance of her first novel was the evolution of the Booker prize winning novelist into an activist. That was probably responsible for her diversion into non-fiction and publication of books opposing armament, industrialization, globalization, etc. She has openly opposed the nuclear explosion carried out by India in 1998, the American policy in Afghanistan and Israel's policies in West Asia, but her two books, viz., *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom* (2011) and *The Hanging of Afzal Guru and the Strange Case of Attack on the Indian Parliament* (2013) brought to the fore her political views on the sensitive issue of Kashmir.

The present book, viz., *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, a political novel by all accounts, as it refers to political personages, but more than that has the political issues at its core which trigger most action. As compared to her last and only other novel *The God of Small Things* (1992), the literary attributes, by no means inconsequential, take secondary place in relation to the writer's political philosophy articulated in this novel. There are several strategies adopted to advance the agenda; these are: being selective in the choice of material, investing negatives with emotional capital through deft use of language, and creating an insider-character to support the opponent's viewpoint. All these make the novel a dystopic one which refuses to note any positivity around or any ray of light at the end of the tunnel.

Storyline

There are tell-tale indicators of dystopia like the graphic of a grave with a flower on it on the cover of the book. The title *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* sitting oddly with the cover picture sarcastically suggesting grave as the purveyor of highest form of happiness. Inside, we find that the book is dedicated to "The Unconsoled". Besides, the action in the story actually begins and ends in a graveyard.

The novel begins with the birth of Aftab, supposedly a boy but whose male organs are not sufficiently developed. As he grows, he exhibits girlish tendencies and is naturally attracted towards *Khwabgah*, the name given to the house of *hijras* (neuters) in old Delhi. There are other *hijras* there living under the tutelage of Kulsoom Bi and Aftab enters it as Anjum. There are arrivals and departures of transgenders of different types. The author takes pains to describe the lifestyle and functioning of the *hijra* community.

Unfortunately, Anjum has to go to Ahmedabad at the time when communal riots take place there following the Godhra train passengers' massacre. Anjum gets stuck in Gujrat for sometime and when she returns, she joins protestors in Delhi. Anjum is so upset with what she saw in Gujrat that she shuns the Khwabgah and shifts to a graveyard and makes it her abode. Slowly, some other characters like Saddam Hussain, a Hindu-turned-Muslim, who started as a security guard but tried hand at many professions unsuccessfully, also join her. A blind Imam (Muslim priest) is a regular visitor here. In this way comes up the Jannat Guest House & Funeral Services. To keep the place going, Anjum steals electricity from the mortuary (68) and the security guard Saddam runs fake drug business (78).

The location of the narrative now shifts to Jantar Mantar in New Delhi where protesters of all shapes and denominations gather. The motley crowd includes the victims of the infamous Bhopal Gas Tragedy as also the activists of Delhi Kabaadi Wallahs Association, Sewage Workers' Union, Manipuri Nationalists, Mothers of the Disappeared in Kashmir, and so on. But more than that is the presence of the Gandhian (Anna Hazare) and Aggarwal (Kejriwal) that links the description to real time happenings. There is also a protestor by the name Azad Bhartiya, and then an abandoned baby adopted finally by Anjum and given the name Miss Jebeen the Second by the author.

Chapter 7 titled 'The Landlord' (incidentally, the last chapter too has the same title) is the monologue of Biplab Dasgupta, a senior army officer posted in Afghanistan, who has come to visit his house in Delhi, part of which is let out. He is an important character who enlightens the readers about the 'inside' news concerning the functioning of the government and the army. There are two tenants in his house and one of them, S. Tilottama is his friend of college days. Nicknamed Tilo, she is described as an unconventional girl who dressed immodestly and smoked cigarettes. Naga (Nagraj Hariharan), son of the foreign secretary, is his classmate too. Thirty years later, they come into contact with one another in different roles. The two men love her but Tilo takes Musa Yeswi, another college friend, as her husband, after his first wife and daughter Miss Jebeen the first, had died in police firing in Kashmir. The marriage takes place in Delhi. After marriage, Musa joins the ranks of militants even though he keeps visiting Tilo periodically in Delhi. Tilo also goes hunting for Musa in Kashmir once, giving the writer opportunity to describe the activities of the terrorists and the army. In Kashmir, she makes love to Musa in the houseboat, is impregnated, but goes in for abortion when she returns to Delhi.

Towards the end of the novel, Musa dies, and within weeks, Tilo marries Naga, who was known as a revolutionary student leader but is now an investigative journalist, "cultivated" by the army. Roy details the ways in which the terrorists camouflage their moves, how the stone-pelters communicate and how even women sympathizers lead them to safe hideouts. How Musa organizes Tilo's stay in his kin Gulrez's houseboat, lets her cool heels for two days (or does he keep a watch from somewhere to see if security forces have got wind of it) and after his rendezvous with her, escapes camouflaged under a woven grass mat and pots of vegetables (374)!

Narrative Style

The novel is fragmented and unwieldy and is short on cohesiveness and conciseness. It is not one novel, rather it is a mix of two novels; one dealing with the *hijra* community and the depressed class, and the second with the issue of terrorism in Kashmir. Even the third short narrative focussing on a woman Naxalite is sought to be linked loosely towards the end. Instances like the entry of Azad Bhartiya in the early part of the novel is tenuously related to the main storyline. His presence in the end to locate the Naxalite mother of Miss Jebeen, the Second is equally an add-on, not integral to the structure of the story. The long letters written by Bhartiya or Revathy are meant to fill pages just like the notes left behind by Tilo that cover pages 245-61 and the repetitive memoranda or reports of police stations. Also unnecessary details of the illness of Tilo's mother could have been avoided without doing any harm to the narrative. There is just too much to be roped in: "...her myriad minor characters and political discussions [...] cause the narrative threads to slip from her hands, leading to a bewildering lack of momentum and focus" (Rooney). That leads to lack of artistic control, as another critic comments: "...unlike *Americannah* or *Twelve Killings*, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* lacks the creativity and subtlety needed to turn issues and themes into an engaging literary masterpiece." (Lahiri).

As if this were not enough, there is an exasperating mix of registers also – Urdu poetry, mundane reportage, personal notings, etc., which test the reader's patience – "frustratingly rambling", as a critic comments, "shockingly uneven in its register. Soaring to flights of irony and poetry one moment, plunging into anodyne reportage the next, it appears to be composed by several minds and hands, unable to decide its tone and texture" (Ghoshal).

Selective

However, we are more concerned about Roy's worldview, which, to say the least, is dystopic. Even though history of post-independence India comprises of numerous events and developments, Roy is selective and chooses the ones that show the ugly and the rotten side of the body politic. When she takes up the issue of militancy in Kashmir, she describes the negative developments in great detail in this unwieldy narrative. So far as positive features are concerned, she mentions in passing only, so that the overall impact is one of despondency and frustration.

Her selection includes the state of emergency imposed in India, the insurgency that rocked Punjab, the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, the Union Carbide Gas Tragedy, Gujrat riots of 2002, anti-Dalit events, 9/11, Maoist insurgency, displacement of people due to the building of dams and other issues which were espoused by her as an activist. Chapter 3 captioned 'The Nativity' refers to the birth of a new India in ironic undertone. The drive to make the unnamed city beautiful meant removing the villages and unauthorized colonies – Roy's pet topic since the Narmada Bachao Andolan days. "Thousands of beggars were rounded up and held in stockades before being shipped out of the city in batches. Their contractors had to pay good money to ship them back in" (99). It looks like a take on Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* that deals with the emergency regime in India and its impact on the slum dwellers. Roy's novel mentions that 3000 people died on the streets last year! The people evacuated are settled on the city's outskirts "in the bright swamp rightly compacted with refuse and colourful plastic bags, where [...] the air was chemical and the water poisonous. Clouds of mosquitoes rose from thick green ponds" (100). So much for the new India!

In this upended cruel and dystopic world, Saddam, formerly Dayachand, kills his father to save his own life when a marauding crowd accosts them on suspicion of having slaughtered a cow. The location is a local police station where his father has been put behind bars because he has not been able to bribe police officer as much as demanded by him. At another place, reference to such incidents comes up again and Roy's research finds another unheard of consequence: "They accuse you of eating beef and then take over your house and your land and send you to a refugee camp. It's all about property, not cows" (402).

Relationships, in a dystopic world, just do not work out the way they should. Tilo's two marriages do not last long, the first because Musa was killed, and the second for reason best known to the couple. Tilo

goes in for abortion because “She worried that the little human she produced would have to negotiate the same ocean full of strange and dangerous fish that she had had to in her relationship with her mother. She did not believe that she would be a better parent than Maryam Ipe” (391). People are strange in the world if you live a life on your own terms and fail to establish a working relationship with the world. Besides, how do we assume that the other person – in this case the aborted baby – would too have the same inclinations and fate as the mother’s?

Roy’s major focus is the situation in Kashmir. She has had to admit that insurgency has played havoc with the tourism business in Kashmir. She knows that the meaning of Azadi for the terrorists is Islamization ‘*Azadi ka matlab kya* [What’s the meaning of freedom?]: *la ilaha illallah*” (374) They enforce their ‘protocol’ about women’s dress even on Tilo! This is “stupidification, idiotification...First Azadi, Then Annihilation. That’s the pattern” says Musa (371). The question that Roy fails to answer is why does Musa stick to terrorism? And why is he projected as an idealist hero in the novel?

Even in situations, where the hand of the terrorists is clearly seen, Roy tries to look the other way. In Kashmir, the terrorists use every trick to befool people and to incite them against the army and the government. The novel notes an incident in which an empty duffel bag was touted as the body of a killed Kashmiri and buried in the presence of thousands of people. Later the place was fenced and a board proclaiming it as Mazar-e-Shohadda was posted there. Years later, when a young stone-pelter (protestor) asked the mastermind of the event, he was told, “This is the trouble with you youngsters, you have absolutely no idea how wars are fought” (311). However, influenced as Roy is by the terrorist camp, the novel states that some people ascribed this rumour to the Rumours Wing of the army!

If Roy were to be believed, then the Indian army is doing nothing, save some stupid things and we are all living at the mercy of the terrorists only. Thus, Roy explains that a fidayeen plan to attack an army camp was aborted only by the terrorists! (276). Similarly, a tailor wanted to have his photograph carrying gun. He was taken away by terrorists to their hideout and his wish was fulfilled. Back home, he was taken prisoner by the BSF as they came to know of his visit to the terrorists’ enclave. Roy wonders childishly if it was worth it? There are several such stories which Roy has picked up from the people sympathetic to terrorists. These find the pride of place in her novel on some twenty pages under the section titled “The Reader’s Digest Book of English Grammar and Comprehension for Very Young Children by S. Tilottama” covering pages 271 to 284. Wonder if Roy got permission to use the title of the well-known journal! Though the length of the stories is described as ‘two *beedis* and four cigarettes’, yet the addition of words “full of marijuana” here would have explained things better!

Emotional Investment

Another strategy to achieve the goal of backing terrorists’ viewpoint is to invest an unfortunate incident with a lot of emotional capital. So, Miss Jebeen’s the First’s funeral comes in handy for emotional overcharge. The emotionally charged letter written by the mother of Miss Jebeen, the Second or the numerous Urdu couplets with English translation, even though superfluous, are meant to play on sentiments of readers.

Roy makes use of rhetoric to raise tempers as while describing the envisaged return of peace after many years, she says in a satiric vein:

... when the militancy was declared contained by the government, and tourist traffic restored to the valley, “after the major militant groups had turned (or been turned) on each other [...] after spies and informers had [...] been killed by their handlers, after renegades absorbed into regular day jobs by the thousands of NGOs [...] after senior bank managers had appropriated the unclaimed money that remained in dead militants’ bank accounts, after the torture centres were converted into plush homes for politicians, after the martyrs’ graveyards grew a little derelict and the number of martyrs had reduced to a trickle (and the number of suicides rose dramatically)... (320).

There is an element of puzzlement, or even bewilderment when Roy tries to comprehend the mind of the common people. Ordinary people crave for peace and security so that they can earn their livelihood and bring up their families. So, when the government offers them hope to start own business and offers cheap loans from banks, they can hardly withhold the temptation to secure monetary benefits where they can. But it is not to the taste of the newly-turned militant Musa: “We were fighting and dying in our thousands for Azadi, and at the same time we were trying to secure cheap loans from the very government we were fighting. We’re a valley of idiots and schizophrenics, and we are fighting for the freedom to be idiotic and --”(359), says Musa. The comment made by a young critic seems pertinent that the writer probably did not want to write the book: “*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* looks like a tome, feels like an epitaph, and seems to be born out of a pregnancy that author-activist didn’t quite want. It feels like a creature expelled from the body, covered in uterine slime and blood, premature – simply because despite the obscenely long gestation period, it doesn’t seem like a finished thought” (Sen).

Use of language is a recognized tool to invest or divest a description of its meaning. Roy describes the whole phenomenon of terrorism as “call for martyrdom that came from across LOC” and that people favoured it *after due consideration*. Check the use of rhetoric:

They followed the new Pied Pipers [Pakistani handlers of militants] up into the high meadows and alpine glades where training camps had been set up. Only after they had been given guns of their own, [...] after they had weighed the odds and decided it was a viable option, only then did they allow the rage and shame of the subjugation they had endured for decades, for centuries, to course through their bodies and turn the blood in their veins into smoke. (313).

Roy is clear that these people included “blackmarketeers, bigots, thugs and confidence tricksters”, who lapped up the free bounties of grenades “being distributed so generously like parcels of choice mutton at Eid” and “grafted the language of God and Freedom, Allah and Azadi, on to their murders and new scams. They made off with money, property and women. /Of course Women./ Women of course./ In this way the insurrection began” (314). Surprisingly, this kind of insurgency fuelled by foreign power and fanned by shady people becomes dear to the writer.

Roy’s bitterness is scattered all over the novel. Her new terminology includes the phrase ‘surplus people/mothers/children’ for the poor, who get crushed under rich men’s cars while asleep on pavement. Did no poor inept or drunken driver ever ride roughshod on road? The graveyard incident in which a goat is slaughtered is painted with an eerie relish that adds to the macabre atmosphere of the graveyard. (70). Historian Ramchandra Guha faulted Roy long back, when she espoused the cause of environment, for her exaggeration and simplification of things: “Ms. Roy’s tendency to exaggerate and simplify, her Manichaeian view of the world, and her shrill hectoring tone, have given a bad name to environmental analysis” (Guha).

Roy’s use of words fails to hide her prejudices. The “bewakoof” (idiotic) kitten thrown overboard into water “didn’t know how to live in a *mintree* occupation” (377), but it’s the army man Amrik Singh who is shown “bewakoof” as he kills Gul thinking him to be Commander Gulrez. Well, if you call military presence ‘mintree occupation’, slam army repeatedly in the novel and mock audaciously their motto pinned on the wall (384), your narrative cannot be called objective. For Roy, the situation in Kashmir is reminiscent of a civil war; the use of terminology indicates it: “Bandipura is ‘liberated’, they [the army] say” mocks the terrorist in his diary (281).

Roy comes out as a politician disparaging the politicians not belonging to her party. Starting with scandalous reference to Maneka Gandhi’s Bombay Dyeing advertisement (34) in which she featured wearing a towel only, she names Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi without any camouflage, but she disparages PM Vajpayee as the lisping poet PM and Manmohan Singh as a “Trapped Rabbit” (104). Prime Minister Narendra Modi is, for her, “Gujrat ka Lalla” (104). She cannot withhold the temptation to refer to the suit that he wore on one occasion: “LallaLallaLalla woven into the pinstriped suit gifted to him” (91). All through, the use of rhetoric is made to create prejudice, as in the following description: “...army camps and torture centres that had mushroomed across the Valley. When the fighting began and

the Occupation tightened its grip..." (311). Roy is known for her command of English language and the knack for coining memorable phrases. Despite this, she uses freely 4-letter words and inane and unquotable phrases with English translation. She even banks upon expletives to lead a chapter to climax. (124). Her politically provocative use of language is seen at worst in her own version of English Alphabet. (208).

Confessional

The third strategy adopted by Roy is to put her words into the mouth of an armyman to show it all coming from the horse's mouth. The penultimate Chapter 11, also titled "The Landlord" is the monologue by the key army officer Biplab Dasgupta, who admits that the ordinary people have now started attacking the army, purportedly in retaliation for army's excesses on people. "And to think that all my life I have been a part of it. It's all I can do to stop myself [...] to ridicule – the sacked, drunk, conscientious objector" (430). He is shown meeting Musa, the prime terrorist portrayed in the novel, who grins and says, "We may turn out to be wrong, but we have already won" (431).

The officer also mocks Hindu nationalism (165); cultivates a firebrand student leader Naga now a journalist who happily capitalizes on the information given by the officer, exposing "crimes of the Indian State" (166); lays bare the greed of the army men, who compete for rewards by falsely exaggerating their actions, etc. (176). Elsewhere, Roy puts the blame on the army for wanting to maintain the status quo so that they can sell to the militants the arms for money (228)!

One may hit upon occasional reports of corruption in the army, but by and large, Indian army has had far better reputation which is mischievously sought to be sullied by Ms. Roy. Who can forget the missions like Sadbhavna in which the army men provided education to children and saved the local people during floods that wreaked havoc in the valley? Roy refers to this particular episode in one sentence and in her own partisan manner: "The army performed stunning helicopter rescues for TV crews" (264), but what stands out is the confession of the narrator Biplab:

The inbuilt idiocy, this idea of jihad, has seeped into Kashmir from Pakistan and Afghanistan. Now, twenty-five years down the line, I think, to our advantage, we have eight or nine versions of the 'True' Islam battling it out in Kashmir. Each has its own stable of Mullahs and Maulanas. Some of the most radical among them – those who preach against the idea of nationalism and in favour of the great Islamic Ummah – are actually on our payroll. (170).

Perhaps Ms. Roy would believe even the Daesh or ISIS to be brainchild of Indian army too!

History-Fiction Interface

The present novel deserves comment both with regard to its theme as also the narrative style. Taking up style here, one must note Roy has used the fictional form to comment on recent history which is intertwined with politics. History and fiction share a mutual and important relationship since from the very beginning. Many writers have done it before, and of all the literary masters, Shakespeare is one brilliant example, whose numerous historical plays use history "not merely as a source of material for writing plays, but also for providing insight into the history and politics of his times" (Dhar 10). He is the best when it comes to commenting in a pure literary and indirect manner on current political situation. But of course, a novelist of Roy's ilk hardly calls for that comparison. Another stalwart John Dryden used his poetic art in *Absalom and Achitophel* with the overt aim to advance the prospects of the king Charles II who was embroiled in a feud with the parliament over the question of his successor. Dryden's verse poem was thoroughly political, yet it was a brilliant witty artistic piece that is enjoyed till this day. In Indian English Fiction category, we come across some brilliant examples of the use of recent history in novels. Salman Rushdie uses it in an artistic garb of magic realism in his novels like *Midnight's Children* which

brought him the Best of Booker. Shashi Tharoor has made a balanced appraisal of all sides to the Babri dispute in his novel *Riot*.

Fictionalizing recent history in our times when the reading public is more aware of politics, demands a detached stance if it has to appeal to the reader who would rather approach a political commentator for political views than a literary writer. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, however, comes out as a political novel rather than a pure artistic attempt. It can be seen that the strategy of emotional investment in sordid events, is offset by the other strategies of selective culling of matter, use of language in a provocative and even profane manner and the insider's confession to buttress own prejudiced stance. Therefore, the scenes which should have aroused empathy in the reader appear artificial and fail to achieve this artistic end.

When it comes to using historical material for fiction, one has to choose from among several versions or create one's own version to fill the gaps convincingly and carrying the potential to advance the writer's point of view. One such concrete way is to use actual newspaper clippings or copies of official record to buttress one's point. In *Lajja*, Taslima Nasreen makes more than adequate use of actual newspaper reports. In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh has given the real life characters in his note at the end of the novel. These lend credence to the fictional episodes and characters. In *Such a Long Journey*, author Rohinton Mistry creates a replica of the real-life Nagarwala which almost conforms to reality. Not in Roy's case. In contrast, Roy's acknowledgements do not show any such link, either to a character or even to a single memorandum or diary entry of which there is a surfeit in the novel.

Counterpoint

Lest the fictional accounts are lapped up by the gullible without adequate proof, it is imperative that these are pitted against realistic accounts too. So, let us turn to a real-life character who has been in the midst of it all, and though Indian army is known for its secular credentials, we have incidentally a Muslim gentleman, Syed Ata Hasnain, who was corps commander in J&K. Having retired quite some time back and therefore, without any liability to conform to the governmental view, he wrote recently in a national daily, ruing the fact that the terrorists had organized their side of what he calls a 'hybrid conflict' involving not only armed conflict but also other domains, viz.:

...promotion of radical ideology, creation of intense alienation, keeping the organs of government on tenterhooks and incapable of governing, intimidation of government agencies, media and private citizens, gun running and narcotics to sustain finances, and lastly and perhaps most importantly maintaining financial conduits for the unimpeded flow of money into the conflict system." The financial conduit also includes the Pakistani embassy in New Delhi where the visiting separatist leaders are provided cash in gift packets! ("There")

Hasnain warns that this is a complex proxy war waged by Pakistan and in this the separatists have been "projecting their cause through literature, social media, media patronage, mosque power, direct engagement and creation of structures which can be activated in minutes to respond to diverse situations" ("There"). Roy's account in the novel supports the last item in this list actuated through the womenfolk who guide the terrorists through the alleys of Srinagar and other cities, with stone-pelters appearing at short notice. But what Roy fails to perceive is the invisible propaganda unleashed by these people with the covert backing of Pakistan, through Indian literature and media. Roy is unconsciously influenced by the discourse created by them. The present government has done well at least to crack down on the money being pumped into the coffers of terrorist organizations by the powers inimical to India, through innocuous channels like the border trade. Effective action on this front has revealed the faultlines in the structures espousing the cause of "azadi". It has also revealed the myopic vision of some of the national political parties.

Core Issues

The core issues that demand examination and re-defining are the following: (i) the politics of the subcontinent, (ii) the threat to democracy from terrorism, (iii) the equation between religion and terrorism, and (iv) the terrorists' claim to human rights. In an article published long back in *The Guardian*, Roy had said, "I spoke about justice for the people of Kashmir who live under one of the most brutal military occupations in the world" (Chamberlain). She needs to acquaint herself with the inside situation in countries like North Korea, China, and Pakistan itself to understand the meaning of the term. Putting a question mark on legitimacy is untenable in a democratic set-up despite its various flaws (and which system is bereft of it?).

Roy is justified in expressing her sympathy for the people of Kashmir who have been suffering for long. But Roy uses her heart not the brains to analyse the vexed problem. Her novel fails to go deeper into the history to trace the chain leading to present problems. Pakistan, in fact, never reconciled to the merger of Kashmir with India back in 1947 when immediately after the Partition, it sent its army dressed as Mujahideen fighters to annex the state coaxing the ruler of the state to accede to India. Starting with the West Pakistan's atrocities in East Pakistan leading to the birth of Bangladesh, Pakistan reactive policy of 'a thousand cuts' through indoctrinated jihadi terrorists, ethnic cleansing of Kashmir by driving out the Hindu Pandit community, the unleashing of terrorist attacks all over India including Kashmir – a policy still followed by the Pakistan army and the ISI. Roy fails to fathom the issue as also how the peace initiatives undertaken by successive governments to bring Pakistan to see reason paid back with attacks on Kargil heights or army bases at Pathankot, Uri and so on.

To her, if the people of Kashmir are terrorized into demanding Azadi, they should be granted it, but supposing this was to materialize, what would be the future scenario? It would not stop at that. Rather it would mean relapsing into the two-nation theory on the basis of religion. In that case, all Muslim dominated areas must secede from India. How is that going to bring peace? Roy evinces the tendency to flow along with her rhetoric and forget her own protestations of secularism or she wilfully abstains from deriving lesson for future from history through a dispassionate and unbiased study. According to Wilkinson, "If unchecked, terrorism can easily escalate to a civil war situation, which the terrorist may seek to exploit in order to establish a terrorist-style dictatorship" (ibid). And we have seen this happen in the emergence of the Daesh or ISIS! So, there could be no hope at the end of the tunnel if India were to catapult to the terrorists' wishes.

The problem of terrorism which is talked about in the novel deserves more insight than is available with the writer. The largest body of terrorists threatening the world today is doing so in the name of religion. On the face of it, no religion claims to support terrorism but we know that fundamentalists tend to be exclusivist with regard to other religions and some of them even support militancy to advance their agenda. Without discussing it further for want of scope here, I shall like to quote Dalai Lama, the Buddhist spiritual leader, who said recently: "People cease to be Muslim, Christian or any group the moment they become terrorists" ("Ultras embrace"). Non-violence and universal love are the founding principles of all great religions.

The bogey of violation of human rights is often raised by the terrorists when they are at the receiving end in a judicial forum. The chief plank of the writer's protest is the issue of human rights on which she takes an idealist stand. The issue of reconciling the ends of human rights with control of violent extremism is indeed challenging. The moot question is whether one, who openly flouts the human rights of peaceful innocent people by killing them like mosquitoes is entitled to appeal for safeguarding his human rights. Democratic societies, as Wilkinson says, are "clearly vulnerable to terrorist attacks because of the openness of their societies and the ease of movement across and within frontiers. It is always easy for extremists to exploit democratic freedoms with the aim of destroying democracy" (196). In the case of subversion supported by an outside state, and for the mistake of treating a state's terrorist as freedom fighter, the states "must adopt the clear principle that 'one democracy's terrorist is another democracy's terrorist'" (Wilkinson 207).

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