

**Race and Gender in *Homegoing*, Gender and Religion in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*:**

**An Intersectional Analysis**



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**An Intersectional Analysis**

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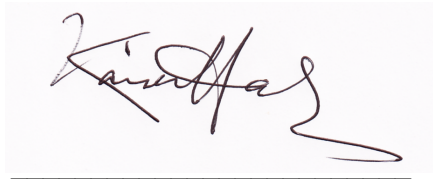
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## **CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kaiser Haq', is written on a light gray rectangular background. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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Kaiser Md. Hamidul Haq, PhD

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## DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.



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## **Abstract**

This study explores how race, gender and religion shape the lives of marginalized people in *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy. It uses Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality to understand how these identities come together and create unique struggles. In *Homegoing*, the study explores how race and gender shape the experiences of both male and female characters across generations, focusing on Effia and H. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the focus is on Anjum, a hijra and a Muslim, whose story shows how gender identity and religion affect her life in complex ways. The study also includes ideas from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Judith Butler to explore silence, resistance and gender identity. These novels show how people are oppressed by those in power because of their identities, yet they continue to endure pain and still find ways to survive and resist.

**Keywords:** Identity, Race, Gender, Religion, Intersectionality, Resistance

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Oppression means the unfair control of power by dominant groups over people who are pushed to the margins. This power imbalance continues through social norms, stereotypes and cultural rejection. It also works through political systems like laws and policies and through unequal access to money and resources. Oppression comes in many forms like racism, gender inequality and religious intolerance. Often, these forms of injustice come together in people's lives which create deep and complicated struggles.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality is useful for understanding how these forms of oppression connect. Crenshaw writes that "because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism," people who live with more than one identity often face a unique kind of struggle (140). This study uses her theory to explore how the characters in *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy deal with oppression shaped by race, gender and religion. Their experiences show how injustice works in different times and places, such as during the transatlantic slave trade, under colonial rule and in modern-day India.

This work also includes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's idea of the subaltern and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. These theories help explain how characters like Effia, H and Anjum are silenced or punished, but also how they fight back in their own ways. According to Hancock, "intersectionality is not just about adding up identities, but about studying how systems of power connect and affect people differently" (64). This idea strengthens the aim of this research to understand both the pain and resistance found in the lives of people who are pushed aside by society.

By using these theories, this study looks closely at how marginalized people reclaim their agency. It gives attention to the deep realities of living with more than one oppressed identity and how people survive and speak out despite those challenges.

## **1.1 Background of the Study**

People across the world face different types of injustice. These injustices are often tied to their race, gender, class, or religion. In many cases, these identities do not exist separately. They come together and shape how a person is treated in society. A woman may face both gender and racial discrimination. A poor man may face class issues along with caste or religious problems. These overlapping identities can make life even harder for people who are already pushed to the margins. In recent years, scholars have started to look at these overlapping struggles more closely. One of the key voices in this area is Kimberlé Crenshaw. She introduced the idea of intersectionality. It helps people see how different parts of a person's identity work together to shape their experience. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak talks about the subaltern. She focuses on people who are not allowed to speak or be heard in society. Judith Butler adds another layer with her idea of gender performativity. She shows how gender is not fixed. It is something shaped by society and repeated actions.

Literature is a powerful space where these ideas come to life. Stories help us understand real struggles in deep and emotional ways. Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* tells the story of two sisters and their bloodlines, showing how slavery and colonialism shaped generations. Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* tells the story of people in modern India who live outside the boundaries set by society. One key character is Anjum, a transgender woman and a Muslim. Her life shows how gender identity and religion can come together to create deep

challenges. Through Anjum's journey, the novel explores how people survive when society tries to erase or reject them.

This study looks at how both novels show the pain and strength of people who live at the crossroads of different identities. It explores how race, gender and religion come together in their lives. The goal is to understand how these characters face and fight back against the systems that try to silence them.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

While previous studies have examined *Homegoing* through lenses of slavery and women's oppression, limited research exists on how male characters simultaneously experience racial and gendered oppression. Similarly, while *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* has been analyzed through isolated religious or gender perspectives, few studies explore how these identities intersect, particularly for gender-diverse individuals like hijras. This study addresses these gaps by examining how intersecting identities shape oppression for men, women and gender-diverse characters across distinct cultural contexts.

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

The objective of this study is to investigate how intersecting identities, such as race, gender and religion create unique experiences of oppression across different cultural and political contexts for marginalized characters like Effia, H and Anjum in the novels, and how these characters employ various forms of resistance, whether through survival or outright rebellion to reclaim agency within unjust systems.

## 1.4 Research Questions

1. How do intersecting identities shape unique experiences of oppression for characters in *Homegoing* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* across different cultural and political contexts?
2. How do marginalized characters in these novels resist oppression through various ways?

## 1.5 Rationale of the Study

Most of the studies focus on identities like gender, race, or religion as separate topics. But in real life, these identities do not work alone. They come together and shape how people are treated and how they see the world. This is why intersectionality is important. It helps us understand how different parts of identity connect and affect each other.

This study is important because it looks at characters who live with more than one identity that society often rejects. In *Homegoing*, characters deal with both racial injustice and gender-based struggles as these two forces shape their lives across generations. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Anjum lives through the struggles of being both transgender and Muslim in a country where both identities are often targeted.

By studying these characters through the lens of intersectionality, this research shows how layered oppression works and how people still find ways to resist. This study adds to the existing work by focusing on both female and male characters in *Homegoing* and by exploring Anjum's identity beyond just gender. It helps readers see the deep impact of overlapping struggles and the strength it takes to survive them.

## 1.6 Research Methodology

This study uses qualitative textual analysis to understand how intersecting identities creates unique forms of oppression in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The primary lens is Kimberlé Crenshaw's "Theory of Intersectionality", which showcases overlap of identities like race, gender and religion, and how they create unique forms of marginalization. This framework is the primary element to understand the challenges faced by marginalized characters in both novels.

Supporting this, the study also applies Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's idea of the subaltern, which is useful for analyzing how characters like Effia and Esi in *Homegoing* are silenced by colonial and patriarchal systems. Just like that, Judith Butler's "Theory of Gender Performativity" is used to explore Anjum's character in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* which helps to focus on how her gender identity and Muslim background contribute to her oppression.

The primary data consists of two novels; *Homegoing* was chosen for its portrayal of race and gender across generations within the context of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* was selected for its exploration of gender identity (third gender/hijra/trans woman) and religion, and how these intersecting identities impact the lives of characters like Anjum in contemporary India.

## 1.7 Scopes and Limitations

This study explores how multiple overlapping identities create the distinct forms of oppression for marginalized people in the selected novels. By focusing on three characters (Effia,

H and Anjum) the research investigates how race, gender and religion intersect across different cultural and political contexts like the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism and contemporary India. The study also examines the various forms of resistance (rebellion, rejection) that's used by these characters to reclaim agency. By applying intersectionality theory with frameworks from Spivak and Butler, this research contributes to understanding the complexities of oppression and resistance, and how marginalized groups (black men and women, hijra) navigate systemic barriers. It also provides a vivid view of two distinct cultural settings which offer interdisciplinary insights into the field of literature.

The study is limited by its focus on just two novels, which may not allow for broad generalizations across other works that address intersectionality. The geographical and historical scope is also confined to the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism and contemporary India which restrict the analysis of other global contexts. Additionally, since the study relies on textual analysis, it may not fully or authentically capture the actual lived experiences outside of the literary representations. The intersectionality framework is undoubtedly useful but in this study it's not addressing all the other dimensions of identity, such as ethnicity or caste. The research also has the potential for subjective interpretation which this study doesn't follow. Lastly, it focuses on only three key characters, which may not fully represent the broader spectrum of experiences portrayed in the novels.

## **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

This study uses three main theories to understand how race, gender and religion come together in the lives of marginalized characters in *Homegoing* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. These theories are Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality, Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak's subaltern theory, and Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity. Each theory helps to explore the different ways people face oppression and also how they resist it.

Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality is the main framework of this study. She explains that people who have more than one marginalized identity often face unique problems that cannot be explained by looking at race or gender alone. In her words, "the intersectional experience is not captured wholly by the race or gender dimensions of that experience alone" (140). This means that people like Black women and men or transgender Muslims do not just face double problems. Their experiences are different and more complex. This theory helps the study understand how the characters in both novels struggle with more than one kind of injustice at the same time. For example, Anjum is both a hijra and a Muslim, and her experiences cannot be fully understood by looking at gender or religion alone. The same applies to characters like Effia and H who deal with racism and gender discrimination in different forms.

The Subaltern idea by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak focuses on people who are pushed so far to the margins that they cannot speak or be heard by the larger society. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak argues that when powerful systems speak for these people, their real voice gets lost. This idea helps the study explore how the characters in *Homegoing*, both men and women are silenced under slavery, tradition and colonialism. Even though they suffer a lot, their stories often go unheard. Spivak's theory helps highlight how their silence is not weakness but the result of deep systemic control.

Judith Butler's theory helps us understand that gender is not something fixed. Instead, it is something we do again and again based on what society expects. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes that "gender is made through repeated actions" (5). This idea is helpful when

studying Anjum's life in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Anjum does not follow traditional gender rules. As a hijra, her life shows how society reacts harshly when someone does not act the way a "man" or "woman" is expected to act. Butler's theory helps explain how Anjum's gender identity is not a choice, but a lived reality that challenges norms. It also shows how her daily actions become a way of both survival and quiet resistance.

By combining these three theories, this study builds a strong base to look at how different identities shape pain, silence, survival and resistance. Crenshaw helps connect the dots between multiple identities. Spivak shows how silence is part of oppression. Butler gives tools to study how people live out gender in ways that society often refuses to accept. Together, these theories help the study explore the lives of characters who are often left out of mainstream discussions and literature.

## **1.9 Operational Definitions**

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a term that describes how overlapping identities shape people's experiences of oppression. In this study, intersectionality refers to how three different identities race, gender and religion combine to create unique forms of discrimination and disadvantage. This framework, as proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw is key to understanding how individuals with multiple marginalized identities experience compounded systems of oppression. In this study, it will be used to examine how these identities inform the experiences of characters in the selected novels.

## **Oppression**

Oppression is the unfair treatment or control of people by those in power. In this research, it means how social, political and cultural systems treat people unequally based on their identity and limit their freedom and opportunities. This concept is crucial in understanding how societal structure, whether colonial, patriarchal, or sectarian reinforce power imbalances. By examining the lives of characters like Effia, H and Anjum, the study will explore how oppression is not only structural but also deeply ingrained in everyday experiences.

## **Marginalization**

Marginalization means pushing people or groups to the edge of society where they have little power or voice. In this study, it refers to how characters like Black man and woman in *Homegoing* and a transgender Muslim in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* are excluded or silenced because of their overlapping identities. This concept connects directly to the ideas of intersectionality and subalternity, as these characters' voices are silenced not only by racism or gender bias but by the compounding nature of their identities. Marginalization, in this sense, serves as a point of departure to explore how these characters navigate through systemic structures of oppression.

## **Resistance**

Resistance refers to the ways in which oppressed individuals fight back against injustice. In this study, it includes how characters (Effia, H, Anjum) in the selected novels engage in small acts of survival, open rebellion, or reject the roles that society tries to impose on them. Resistance here is seen as a form of agency, allowing individuals to reclaim their autonomy despite oppressive forces. Drawing from postcolonial theory and feminist thought, this study will

explore the characters' acts of resistance as means of asserting identity and challenging the societal norms that marginalize them.

### **Agency**

Agency in this study means the ability of a character to make choices, act for themselves and push back against the systems that try to control them, even when they are in difficult or oppressive situations. In relation to intersectionality, agency is crucial because it reflects how individuals with complex identities assert control over their lives and challenge external forces. By analyzing characters' actions, the study will explore how agency operates within systems of power that seek to disempower marginalized individuals, and how it serves as a vehicle for social change in the context of colonial, patriarchal and sectarian struggles.

### **Gender Performativity**

This term, based on Judith Butler's theory, means that gender is not something we are born with, but something we do through repeated actions. In this research, it helps explain how characters like Anjum express their gender identity. Butler's concept of gender performativity allows us to understand gender not as a fixed category but as something fluid, created through societal performance. This framework will be used to explore how characters navigate and subvert societal expectations about gender, especially those who do not fit into normative gender roles, as seen in Anjum's experiences.

### **Subaltern**

This term comes from postcolonial theory and refers to groups who are socially, politically and geographically outside the dominant power structures. In this study, subaltern

means characters who are silenced or not given a space to speak in society. The concept of the subaltern helps to examine how marginalized characters, like Anjum, are often rendered voiceless within dominant power structures. Drawing on the work of Gayatri Spivak, this study will explore the intersections of identity and power that contribute to the silencing of these characters and how their voices are reclaimed or represented.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review aims to demonstrate the need for a more nuanced intersectional reading of *Homegoing* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, especially focusing on how overlapping identities of race, gender and religion compound the marginalization of characters often underrepresented in critical discourse.

The mentioned novels offer profound explorations of how race, gender and religion intersect to shape the lives of marginalized individuals. Gyasi's multigenerational saga traces the descendants of two Ghanaian sisters, one married to a British slaver, the other enslaved in America which reveal how systemic oppression evolves across centuries. On the other hand, Roy's novel, set in contemporary India, centers on Anjum, a hijra (transgender woman) and Muslim, whose identity places her at the margins of society. Both authors illuminate the complexities of identity through narratives that resist singular categorizations of oppression.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality provides a crucial framework for analyzing these texts, as it challenges the tendency to examine race, gender and religion as isolated factors. Instead, intersectionality reveals how these identities converge to produce unique experiences of marginalization. In an interview, titled "Kimberlé Crenshaw Discusses Intersectional Feminism," Crenshaw tries to explain how Black women are discriminated not only because of their race but also because of their gender: She says, "the basic term came out of a case where I was looking at Black women who were being discriminated against not just as Black people, not just as women, but as Black women." (0:56-1:04), which applies in the case of Black men as well. Building upon this concept Deborah K. King introduces the notion of "multiple jeopardy" to further elucidate the compounded nature of oppression. King asserts that

“being Black and female is not simply a matter of race plus gender; rather, the effects of these factors are multiplied, intensifying the individual's experience of discrimination” (47). This perspective underscores the necessity of analyzing characters' experiences through an intersectional lens to fully grasp the depth of their marginalization. Supporting this, Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern underscores how oppressed groups are often denied a voice within dominant power structures (72), while Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity highlights how gender is constructed through repeated societal norms rather than inherent biology (33). Together, these theories allow for a deeper interrogation of how systemic forces operate across different cultural and historical contexts.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on these novels, critical gaps remain. Many studies focus narrowly on either race or gender, neglecting how these forces intersect differently for male and female characters. For instance, while the trauma of Black women in *Homegoing* has been extensively analyzed, the struggles of Black men, such as H's imprisonment under Jim Crow laws are often overlooked or reduced to racial oppression alone (Gyasi 151). Farah Raounak's dissertation, “Intersectionality and Women's Resistance in *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi” (2024), looks at the struggles of female characters of African descent. It focuses on the different types of oppression they face, including those based on race, gender and class. Raounak uses Black feminism and postcolonial feminism to explore the way these women deal with intergenerational trauma and the overlapping aspects of their identities. She highlights how these women resist and fight back, showing their strength and determination to change their lives across generations. Raounak suggests that their actions reflect their desire for justice and equality (44). However, her study mainly centers on the female characters, leaving a gap in the analysis of Black male characters in *Homegoing*, which is also an important part of intersectionality.

Similarly, discussions of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* frequently isolate Anjum's hijra identity from her Muslim background, ignoring how religious persecution compounds her marginalization. In an article, Al-Mamun et al. write, "Throughout Bangladesh's history, the hijra community has been the country's most marginalized and oppressed sexual group" (3). In Bangladesh, they face exclusion for their gender. If a hijra who is also Muslim moves to India, which is a Hindu majority country, they may face added discrimination for their religion. This shows how gender and religion together can deepen the level of oppression. In an article, Anuar et al. explore the portrayal of hijras and their gender and sexual nonconformity, focusing on how they suffer within society due to their identity and resist societal norms. However, their analysis does not address the religious aspect of Anjum's identity, leaving out the additional layer of marginalization she faces as a Muslim hijra. The study applies Hélène Cixous's theories of inherent bisexuality and *écriture féminine* to show how Anjum challenges existing definitions of gender. While the focus is on their resistance to heteropatriarchal norms, the research overlooks how religion intersects with gender to shape Anjum's experiences.

The limitations of single-axis analysis become especially apparent when examining Black male characters in *Homegoing*. Quey, for example, grapples with the pressures of colonial masculinity, forced to suppress his queer identity to align with societal expectations (Gyasi 132). His experience cannot be understood solely through race; it demands an intersectional lens that considers how gender norms and colonial power intersect. Similarly, Kojo's storyline where he navigates systemic racism in 20th-century America, reveals how Black masculinity is policed through economic disenfranchisement and state violence (Gyasi 65). Scholars like Patricia Hill Collins argue that Black men's oppression is often rendered invisible within feminist and anti-racist discourses, which tend to prioritize either white women or Black women as subjects of

analysis (25). This erasure perpetuates a fragmented understanding of oppression, one that *Homegoing* actively challenges by depicting the full spectrum of Black experiences.

In contrast, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* demonstrates how oppression operates within India's religious hierarchies. Anjum's identity as a hijra and Muslim places her at the intersection of gender and religious marginalization, making her vulnerable to both state violence and societal exclusion (Roy 2). Unlike the racialized oppression in *Homegoing*, Anjum's struggles are shaped by India's history of Islamophobia and the exclusion of hijras. The novel's portrayal of the 2002 Gujarat riots highlights how religious identity can become a site of brutal violence (Roy 41). Judith Butler notes that "the cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot exist" (24). Anjum's identity falls outside these socially accepted categories, making her existence itself a form of resistance. Her act of creating a community in a graveyard defies both Islamophobic and transphobic violence, offering a form of agency distinct from the resistance in *Homegoing* (Roy 38). Jasbir Puar's concept of "homonationalism" is useful here, as it critiques how Western queer liberation narratives often ignore the specificities of queer oppression in postcolonial contexts (Puar 63).

The idea of resistance varies across the novels. Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" looms large in *Homegoing*, where characters like Effia are physically silenced by slavery (Gyasi 67). Yet, their resistance persists through cultural preservation, such as Effia's adherence to African traditions despite forced assimilation. As Achebe emphasizes, reclaiming voice is often tied to cultural memory and oral history (4), a theme that Gyasi powerfully illustrates. In the other novel, Anjum's voice is constantly contested; as a hijra, she is both hyper-visible and socially erased (Roy 13). Scholars such as Mandal, argue that "Anjum's

identity positions her as a subaltern subject, whose marginality exposes the violence of normative gender and religious categories in contemporary India” (234). Rather than through direct political speech, her resistance emerges in how she navigates life on the margins, surviving communal violence, reclaiming space in a graveyard and building a sanctuary for the excluded. Her presence challenges dominant narratives by simply existing in defiance of social and governmental neglect.

The resistance strategies in these novels also merit closer examination. In *Homegoing*, resistance ranges from outright rebellion, such as Kojo's defiance when he refuses to leave Baltimore despite the enforcement of the Bloodhound Law to capture Black people, as he and his family are officially free and not enslaved (Gyasi 115), to subtler acts of endurance, like Esi's preservation of the Twi language, which serves as an act of cultural resistance (Gyasi 67). In Roy's work, resistance is often collective, as marginalized groups create alternative communities to survive state violence (Roy 12). These differences highlight how resistance is shaped by the specificities of oppression. Audre Lorde's concept of self-preservation as an act of political warfare resonates here, particularly in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, where Anjum's survival itself becomes a form of defiance ( 55).

In conclusion, *Homegoing* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* demand an intersectional reading that accounts for the interplay of race, gender and religion. These novels reveal how oppression is not monolithic but shaped by cultural and historical specificities. By centering marginalized voices and resistance strategies, they challenge dominant narratives and offer new ways of understanding systemic injustice.

### **Chapter 3: An Intersectional Reading of Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*: Exploring Race and Gender Across Generations and Geographies**

Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* traces three centuries of a family divided by the transatlantic slave trade. Born in 18th-century Ghana, sisters Effia and Esi never meet—one married to a British officer in Cape Coast Castle, the other imprisoned in its dungeons before being shipped across the Atlantic. Though their descendants' lives unfold on opposite sides of the ocean (Ghana and America), their stories intertwine through shared legacies of racial and gendered oppression.

This analysis focuses on Effia and H as representative figures whose lives encapsulate the broader themes of race, gender and generational trauma in *Homegoing*. These two characters have been carefully selected from the novel's wide cast because they embody distinct yet interconnected experiences within the African and African American branches of the family. Effia's narrative offers a critical lens into the early stages of colonialism and the gendered dynamics of power, silence and survival within the Gold Coast. Her story highlights how patriarchal and colonial systems intersect to shape the lives of African women.

In contrast, H's story unfolds in the post-slavery American South, where the legacy of racial violence and systemic oppression continues to manifest through forced labor, incarceration, and limited personal agency. His experiences demonstrate how Black masculinity is criminalized and dehumanized within a white supremacist society. Together, Effia and H provide a compelling framework for exploring the nuances of intersectionality across different periods and geographies. By focusing on these two characters, the analysis captures the complex and often contrasting realities of Black life shaped by overlapping structures of race, gender, and

historical circumstance. Their stories, though separated by continents and generations, reflect the resilience and resistance that define much of the novel's central message.

### **Effia's Oppression:**

Effia Otcher's life begins with fire and silence. From her first appearance in *Homegoing*, she is placed at the center of power, pain and control. She is not enslaved like her half-sister Esi, but her life is shaped by the same systems that devalue Black women. Through Effia, we see how colonialism and patriarchy work together to control women's bodies, voices and choices. Her story is a powerful example of what Kimberlé Crenshaw describes as intersectionality—the idea that race and gender combine to create unique forms of discrimination. Effia's experiences also echo Gayatri Spivak's idea that subaltern women are often denied the right to speak for themselves.

Effia is raised in a Fante village by her father Cobbe and her stepmother Baaba. Baaba is harsh and cruel, but her cruelty is not just personal. She is also a victim of patriarchy, a system that not only oppresses women but also forces them to repeat its cruelty. Baaba's abuse of Effia is not just personal malice. It is the unavoidable result of her own oppression. Yaa Gyasi's metaphor, "Cobbe was a lion and Baaba was a tree" (2) captures the rigid, dehumanizing roles patriarchy forces on people. The lion roams, dominates and devours, while the tree stays fixed, suffering in silence. This is reminiscent of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*, where the protagonist, Yeong-hye, undergoes a metamorphosis into a tree under the system of patriarchy. Baaba suffers quietly, while Yeong-hye loses herself in madness. But Gyasi's approach is more grounded in real social forces. Baaba's "tree like" life is not rebellion. It is forced stillness, a role she cannot escape without disappearing completely. Unlike Yeong-hye, whose change is a strange kind of

protest, Baaba obeys to survive. She hurts Effia because refusing would destroy her. This difference shows how patriarchy works in different cultures. In *Homegoing*, resistance is not about losing your mind. It is about making hard choices to stay alive. Baaba's lack of power is built into the system. Her violence toward Effia is a twisted way of taking control, the only power she has in a world that treats women as either victims or objects. The cycle of brutality, "Baaba beat Effia. Cobbe beat Baaba" (Gyasi 2), shows how patriarchy keeps itself going. Women, with no real freedom become both victims and abusers, strengthening the system that traps them. This pattern mirrors Frantz Fanon's idea that "when the oppressed have no way to fight back, they often take their anger out on those below them" (54). Baaba's cruelty is not just her own. It is a sign of her powerlessness, proof of how oppression poisons even close relationships. In the end, Gyasi does not try to make Baaba's pain or Effia's suffering seem noble. The book makes it clear that oppression does not make people better. It wraps them. Baaba's body, like Effia's, is marked by a world that gives women no real power, only the fake control that comes from hurting others. This is not just a sad pattern of abuse. It is a system forcing victims to become its tools, proving patriarchy's worst trick: it makes the oppressed enforce their own chains.

From a young age, Effia learns her voice holds no weight. When she questions why Adwoa must marry a white man, Baaba shuts her down: "Because her mother says so" (Gyasi 4). This simple reply reveals a brutal truth; in this society, women's bodies are currency. Adwoa isn't just getting married. She's being sold for "fifteen pounds, fabric, millet, gold and iron" (Gyasi 4). The transaction shows how both African patriarchy and colonial capitalism reduce women to objects of trade. The power imbalance becomes even clearer during Adwoa's wedding feast: "All of the men had been served and the women finally began to eat" (Gyasi 5). This isn't just

tradition, it's a display of power. While men enjoy the celebration, women work silently and eat last. Their labor fuels the village, yet their needs come last. The scene shows how gender oppression operates daily, even in moments meant for joy. Cobbe's treatment of Effia reveals another layer. Though he cares for her, his vision for her future is limited. When Adwoa leaves, he remarks, "She would have made a good wife" (Gyasi 5). This comment exposes how even loving fathers see daughters through patriarchal lenses. To Cobbe, Effia's highest purpose is becoming a wife, not a leader, not a thinker. His affection can't escape the system that defines women's worth by their marriageability. The ultimate betrayal comes when Effia becomes part of the colonial trade. James Collins, a British soldier, offers the highest price: "thirty pounds up front and twenty-five shillings a month in tradable goods to Baaba as bride gift" (Gyasi 12). The numbers are precise because Effia's value has been calculated like merchandise. Here, racism and sexism intersect, as an African woman, Effia becomes doubly valuable to colonial powers. Her body represents both sexual and economic conquest. Baaba's cruel lie completes this oppressive picture by manipulating Effia's biological development. After Effia gets her first period, which is a normal sign of womanhood, Baaba gives her a chilling command: "When anyone asks you if you have become a woman yet, you will answer no" (Gyasi 8). This secret forms the basis of Baaba's later lie to Chief Abeeku, the man Effia might have loved, when she declares Effia is cursed: "She has the body of a woman, but something evil lurks in her spirit... She will never bear children" (Gyasi 13). This fabricated curse serves multiple purposes. First, it removes Effia from Baaba's sight, showing how women enforce patriarchy against each other. Second, it makes Effia more valuable to white colonizers: "If the white man marries her, he will think of this village fondly, and your trade will prosper from it" (Gyasi 13). Baaba weaponizes both gender stereotypes and racial politics, using Effia's body as a bargaining chip in the colonial

economy. The tragedy isn't just that Effia has no choice. It's that everyone benefits from her silence; her African family gains wealth, the white colonizers gain a wife and the village gains trade advantages. Her body becomes a meeting point for multiple systems of oppression: African patriarchy that treats women as property and European colonialism that sees African bodies as resources. Neither system views Effia as fully human. This is the double violence of intersectional oppression. As a black woman, Effia faces compounded control from her own community's gender norms and from the racial hierarchies of colonialism. Her story shows how power operates at these crossroads, where different forms of discrimination reinforce each other to erase a woman's autonomy completely.

After her marriage, Effia moves into Cape Coast Castle. She lives in comfort above the dungeons, where enslaved people like her sister Esi are held. She hears their cries at night. "She had heard stories of the women in the dungeons... women who screamed all night long" (Gyasi 14). Effia is not a slave, but she is still trapped. She is married to a man who does not understand her. She is cut off from her roots. Her position embodies the paradox of colonial womanhood; she is granted privilege through proximity to whiteness, yet permanently marked as inferior by her race and gender. While her Fante identity connects her to those suffering below, her marriage alienates her from both communities. The white men in the Castle do not see the African women as wives. "She'd heard the Englishmen call them 'wenches,' not wives. 'Wife' was a word reserved for the white women across the Atlantic" (Gyasi 16). These men use local women for sex and children, but they give them no rights. "Because the white men could not leave money in their wills to their Fante wives and children, they left it to other soldiers and friends" (Gyasi 7). Even in death, African women are denied what is theirs. This legal erasure reveals how colonialism created different categories of womanhood based on race. White wives were

honored, while black women served as mothers without recognition. The system exploited African women's reproductive labor while denying them legal standing. Effia tries to connect with James through love and care. But their worlds are different. One day, she puts roots under their bed to help her conceive. James becomes angry. "Now, Effia, I don't want any voodoo or black magic in this place" (Gyasi 20). He calls her stories and culture dark and dangerous. Effia sees the double standard. "Only the white men talked of 'black magic'... As though magic had a color" (Gyasi 20). She does not understand this need to call one thing good and another evil, one thing white and another black. "In her village, everything was everything. Everything bore the weight of everything else" (Gyasi 20). This line shows how colonialism separates and judges what used to be whole. James' reaction exemplifies epistemic violence, the colonial dismissal of indigenous knowledge as 'savage' while positioning European thought as rational. Effia's spiritual practice becomes racialized as 'black' magic, reinforcing the hierarchy that frames her entire identity as inherently suspect. The Castle itself becomes a physical manifestation of intersectional oppression, its architecture separating white from black, free from enslaved, sacred from profane. Effia's liminal existence in its upper floors mirrors the impossible position of colonized women: too African to be equal, too 'civilized' to be pitied.

### **Effia's Resistance:**

Effia's world is built to control her. From her family to her marriage, from her village to the Castle, every space she enters tells her to be quiet, obedient and grateful. But Effia does not completely submit. Her resistance is not loud or dramatic. She does not break chains or raise weapons. Instead, she fights through memory, motherhood, self-protection and silence. She resists the roles others try to trap her in by holding onto what makes her feel human: her stories, her love for her child and her ability to see the truth, even when others deny it.

Effia resists first by remembering. She pays close attention to what happens around her, even when she cannot speak about it. She watches the way women are sold and traded. She remembers the lies Baaba told to have her sent away. She carries the pain of her own mother's absence. Later, when she has her son Quey, she tells him stories about her past. She says, "I will tell you the story of the fire" (Gyasi 50). Even though her family once told her to never speak of that night, Effia keeps it alive. Her refusal to forget is a quiet act of rebellion. It means she sees her life as worth remembering, even if no one else does. Effia also resists by caring for Quey differently than she was cared for. Baaba had controlled and hurt her. Cobbe had decided her fate without asking her. Effia breaks that pattern. "She never hit him, even when the other mothers taunted her, telling her that she would spoil him" (Gyasi 49). Instead of punishment, Effia offers softness. She lets Quey be a child. She teaches him the values of patience and love. This choice, though small, is radical. It stops the violence from passing to the next generation. It shows that even without power in the world, Effia has control over how she loves. Another part of Effia's resistance is her refusal to forget her roots. Even when she lives in Cape Coast Castle, far from her village, she does not let go of her past. She remembers the stories of "Anansi the spider" (Gyasi 20). She thinks about her brother Fifi and the food they used to eat. She holds on to her language and her values. Though James does not respect her culture, she refuses to let it die. "In her village, everything was everything. Everything bore the weight of everything else" (Gyasi 20). This sentence holds her whole worldview. It is a rejection of the colonial idea that life must be divided into black and white, good and bad, powerful and weak. For Effia, life is complicated, connected and full of meaning. Holding onto this belief, even when everyone around her denies it, is a powerful act of resistance. Effia's cultural memory is also passed on through the black stone pendant she gives to Quey. It belonged to her mother, Maame, the woman she never met

but still remembers in her body and spirit. When Quey asks where it came from, she tells him that the stone is “older than memory” (Gyasi 50). It becomes a symbol of what has been taken from her and what she refuses to let be erased. By giving it to Quey, Effia makes sure her story will not disappear. She plants a seed of truth in him, even if he does not understand it yet. She ensures that her pain and her mother’s pain will be known. Effia also resists the pressure to become what others expect her to be. She does not fully accept the role of “wench” (Gyasi 16) that the British men assign to African women. Even when James tries to erase her identity by mocking her beliefs and forbidding her rituals, she protects her way of knowing the world. When he gets angry about the roots she places under the bed, she does not apologize for her actions. She does not argue either. She simply reflects: “Only the white men talked of ‘black magic’” (Gyasi 20). This line shows that she understands the deeper issue. She sees how colonialism tries to make African spirituality seem dangerous, while treating European ideas as truth. By refusing to fully internalize that logic, Effia keeps her mind free, even if her body is not. Even in her marriage, Effia finds ways to create space for herself. She makes peace with James in her own way. She finds comfort in raising her son and making their home a place of warmth. Though she cannot escape the Castle, she softens the hardness inside it. When she is older and Quey has grown, she does not lie to him about their past. She tells him the truth about Baaba, about how she was sent away, about the fire and the lies. She could have stayed silent, but she does not. Her honesty becomes a final act of power. She breaks the silence that once trapped her.

Effia’s resistance demonstrates the core argument in Gayatri Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” While colonial and patriarchal systems work to silence women like her, Effia finds ways to assert her voice outside approved channels. She embodies Spivak’s concept of the subaltern who cannot speak within dominant power structures but who nevertheless

communicates through alternative means. Where Spivak shows how Western discourse erases marginalized voices, Effia's actions prove that subaltern speech persists in different forms. Her quiet rebellion through storytelling, mothering and cultural preservation creates what Spivak calls a "space of resistance" (104). The fire story she shares with Quey, the Anansi tales she remembers and the black stone pendant she passes down all serve as counter narratives to official history. Effia's resistance does not take the form of dramatic protest but manifests through daily acts of preservation. She refuses to forget what others want erased. She breaks cycles of violence through gentle parenting. She maintains traditions that colonialism seeks to destroy. In doing so, she answers Spivak's famous question by showing that while the subaltern may be denied a platform within power structures, she finds other ways to speak truth. Ultimately, Effia's story reveals the limitations of Spivak's framework. Where Spivak emphasizes the subaltern's silencing, Effia demonstrates that marginalized people continue to communicate meaningfully within their communities. Her legacy lives in the stories she shares, the values she teaches Quey and the cultural knowledge she preserves. This suggests that while dominant systems may prevent the subaltern from being heard by those in power, they cannot fully extinguish subaltern voices.

### **H's Oppression and Resistance:**

In Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, the character H lives in a world where freedom is not guaranteed by law but determined by power. Although H is technically born free, the society around him treats his body as a threat and a commodity. His life becomes a powerful example of Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, where H's Blackness and masculinity are both targets of systemic violence. His experiences show that even after slavery is officially abolished, Black men remain trapped in systems that criminalize their very existence. Gyasi also reflects ideas in

Spivak's theory of subalternity, though adapted to Black male experience, showing how even the strong, vocal and resistant like H can be crushed by systems built to silence and erase.

H is born after the Civil War, during a time when the country claims to be rebuilding under freedom. But that freedom never quite reaches him. From the beginning, H is denied the right to his own identity. His name is just a letter. "H ain't no kind of name" (Gyasi 150), a fellow prisoner tells him. H answers, "It's the only one I got" (Gyasi 150). This brief exchange is loaded with meaning. He is a man with no name, no past, no roots that the system recognizes. According to his old master, H's mother refused to name him and took her own life after his birth. His body entered a world that had already decided what he would be: expendable. But this loss of identity does not begin with H. It begins generations earlier, with his ancestor Esi, his great-grandmother who was enslaved, raped and shipped across the Atlantic. Esi had once been the daughter of a warrior, a girl with a name and a future. In the dungeon of Cape Coast Castle, she lost her family, her freedom and her voice. She swallowed the stone her mother had given her to protect the only memory she had left. That swallowed stone becomes a symbol passed down to each generation, including H, who is born nameless, rootless and unprotected in a world that continues to use Black bodies for profit. The legacy of slavery does not vanish with emancipation. It changes form. For H, intersectionality lives in the way race and gender combine to mark his body as both powerful and dangerous. As a Black man, he is criminalized for his size, his silence and his mere presence. While patriarchy often privileges men, H's story proves that Black men, especially those descended from the enslaved, are not immune to oppression. They, too, are denied personhood, autonomy and safety. His strength becomes a reason to chain him, not free him. His labor is demanded, not rewarded. His name is erased because his past has been treated as disposable. This link between H and Esi reveals how intersectional violence

crosses generations and gender lines. Both are trapped in systems that control their bodies and silence their voices. Esi is raped and imprisoned in a dungeon. H is beaten and worked to death in an underground mine. One is called a wench. The other is given a letter. Neither is allowed to belong to themselves. *Homegoing* shows that even when laws change, the systems of race and gender continue to oppress. Freedom remains a broken promise. And for men like H, born from women who were enslaved, every breath is still a negotiation between survival and disappearance.

In prison, H becomes a part of the **convict leasing system**, a form of slavery by another name. The white men in power see H's body and decide his worth based on how much coal he can shovel. When introduced to the pit boss, a disturbing trade takes place: "He may be big, but he'll bleed just like the rest of them" (Gyasi 152), the pit boss says, pressing a knife to H's neck until a line of blood appears. This moment shows how racial capitalism and patriarchy devalue Black men. H's strength is not admired. It is seen as a threat and a tool to be used. He is treated like livestock, bought and evaluated on his ability to perform hard labor and endure pain. In one of the most vivid passages, Gyasi describes the underground world of the mines:

"It had never occurred to H... that there was anything more than dirt and water, bugs and roots, under the earth. Now he saw that there was an entire city underground... occupied almost entirely by black men and boys" (Gyasi 152).

This "city" is a metaphor for the hidden system of oppression that continued after slavery. The mines are not just dangerous. They are deadly. H shovels "fourteen thousand pounds of coal" (Gyasi 153) a day. He sleeps shackled to other men on wooden bunks where death is common and whippings are normal. One man dies for missing a quota by "171 pounds" (Gyasi 153) and

his body is left in the mine as a warning to others. The entire system turns Black labor into a tool of control. And H knows this. He says: “At least when he was a slave, his master had needed to keep him alive... Now, if H died, they would just lease the next man. A mule was worth more than he was” (Gyasi 153–54). H’s life proves that racial capitalism does not just exploit; it disposes.

H’s gender plays a huge role in how he is treated. Patriarchy in white supremacist America dehumanizes Black men by painting them as dangerous, sexual threats. When arrested, H does not even know his charge. He finds out it was allegedly because he was seen “studying” a white woman, Cora Hobbs. Whether or not it was true doesn’t matter. His body was evidence enough. This fear of Black masculinity has deep historical roots. Slavery, and later Jim Crow, used the myth of the Black male rapist to justify lynching and incarceration. Crenshaw’s intersectionality shows how Black men are both hyper-visible and invisible. H is feared and watched, but never heard. His strength becomes a reason for violence, not protection. In the mines, H earns the name “Two-Shovel” (Gyasi 155) for filling two quotas, saving a white man from death. Still, he is never rewarded. His body breaks. “Can’t feel my arms” (Gyasi 155), he whispers one night. “I don’t want to die” (Gyasi 155), he repeats over and over. This is a man who once said, “Can’t nobody kill me” (Gyasi 149). Now he realizes the truth: this system can kill anyone. Even him.

Though the mines are filled mostly with Black men, some white convicts are thrown in as well. At first, they insult the Black prisoners. They cry when they are chained to Black men. But soon, they realize survival depends on cooperation. H reflects: “That white convict would soon learn that if he wanted to live, he would have to put his faith in a black man” (Gyasi 154). This temporary solidarity shows the lie of racial superiority. Underground, in darkness, color matters

less than strength and skill. But this solidarity is fragile. Above ground, H knows that no strike or union will ever treat Black men as equals. He says it plainly: “When a white man ever listened to a black man?” (Gyasi 163). Still, H joins the strike. He becomes a leader. His voice starts to matter. They fight for better pay, better care and fewer hours. After six months, they win a small raise. It’s not justice. But it’s something.

H’s relationship with Ethe shows another side of his struggle. He once cheated on her and called her by another woman’s name. That wound is deep. But after his release, he writes to her: “Deer Ethe. This is H. I am now free an livin in Prat City” (Gyasi 163). When she sees him again, she speaks with pain and power: “Ain’t I been through enough? Ain’t just about everything I ever had been taken away from me? My freedom. My family. My body. And now I can’t even own my name?... That was all I had of myself too. And you wouldn’t even give me that” (Gyasi 167). Her words reveal how gendered trauma crosses into love. Ethe has suffered too. H’s betrayal was not just emotional. It was a reminder that even in love, Black women are denied dignity. But her voice, her refusal to be erased, becomes the beginning of H’s healing. He listens. He lowers his weapon. He does not run this time.

After freedom, H builds a home with his own hands. He works from “8 p.m. to 3 a.m.” (Gyasi 161), using wood from old friends. He joins the union. He fights for better conditions. In his own way, H becomes a builder, not just of homes but of legacies. His final act of resistance is remembering. He does not forget what the mines did to him. He does not forget the boy who died. He buries the dead with care. In doing so, he refuses the dehumanization forced on them. Memory itself becomes an act of power. H is a man who was never meant to survive. Born without a name, imprisoned without a trial, worked until his body nearly broke, H’s life is a study in intersectional oppression. Racism marks him as dangerous. Masculinity makes him a

target. The two forces combine to turn his body into a site of control and violence. But through strength, memory and love, H also resists. He joins the strike. He builds a house. He mails a letter. He listens to a woman who demands her name back. Yaa Gyasi shows that oppression is not just about chains. It's about silence. And resistance is not always loud. Sometimes it's in the letter you ask a boy to write. Sometimes it's in the way you listen. Sometimes it's in the name you give back.

#### **Chapter 4: An Intersectional Reading of Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*: Gender and Religious Marginalization Through the Character of Anjum**

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* follows the life of Anjum, a transgender Muslim woman who is born as Aftab in Old Delhi and later joins the Hijra community after realizing she does not fit into the gender identity her family and society expect. Her journey takes place in modern-day India, a country that claims to be democratic and inclusive but often fails to protect those who do not match the dominant social, gender or religious norms. Anjum's life becomes a powerful story of what it means to live with multiple identities that are pushed to the margins. She is not only judged for being a Hijra but also faces violence and rejection for being a Muslim in a Hindu-majority nation that continues to grow more intolerant. Her experiences show how gender and religion combine to shape the pain, silence and resistance of marginalized people.

This analysis focuses on Anjum as a central figure who allows readers to understand how oppression works through daily rejection, legal exclusion and the threat of physical violence. From her early years in a traditional Muslim household to her life in the Khwabgah and later in the graveyard that she turns into a home, Anjum's story reveals how people who do not fit into society's strict categories are denied basic dignity. Her character reflects the core ideas of intersectionality because her suffering cannot be explained by gender alone or religion alone. It is the mix of both that makes her life more difficult and also more powerful. The novel shows how Anjum's resistance does not come through anger or revenge but through care, memory and the creation of a space where others who are rejected can find safety. By building the Jannat Guest House in a graveyard, she creates a home for the forgotten, the abandoned and the broken. Her story challenges the rules of who is allowed to belong and who must live on the edges. Through

Anjum's journey, the novel gives space to those whose lives are often ignored, and it makes the reader question the systems that push people out. Like Effia and H in *Homegoing*, Anjum's life speaks of survival, resilience and quiet acts of strength. Her story adds to the understanding of how intersectional oppression looks in a different place and time, yet carries the same weight and pain found in other parts of the world.

### **Anjum's Oppression:**

Anjum's life in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is marked by layers of exclusion. Her story is a powerful example of how multiple identities can overlap to intensify marginalization. As a Muslim Hijra, Anjum experiences not just rejection from society because of her gender identity, but also deep-rooted prejudice against her religion. Arundhati Roy creates a character whose suffering is not because of one identity, but because of the way two oppressed identities combine. This is how the novel shows the weight of intersectionality without needing to name it.

From the moment of her birth, Anjum is caught between definitions. The initial joy that surrounds her birth as Aftab quickly turns into fear when her mother discovers "a small, unformed, but undoubtedly girl-part" (Roy 12) beneath his male genitals. Jahanara Begum's reaction moves from affection to terror to violent imagination. She considers killing both herself and the child. This horror is not only because of the physical anomaly but because of what it means in the social and religious order she understands. In Urdu, as the novel says, "all things... had a gender. Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman" (Roy 12). Her child exists outside this linguistic and cultural logic. In a world defined by binary gender roles, Anjum's existence is unintelligible, and this unintelligibility is a form of violence. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity helps to read this moment more deeply. Butler argues that gender

is not an essence but a set of repeated performances governed by social expectations. Anjum, however, was never able to conform to these performances in a way that society recognized as coherent. Her family tried to impose masculinity on her through clothes, through poetry, through stories of warrior ancestors. Her father clings to hope that her “affliction” could be surgically corrected. These efforts to normalize her body through medicine and social roles ultimately fail, because the structure they are trying to place her within does not accommodate difference. The very fact that her body resists this binary framework makes her an outcast.

Her gender nonconformity intersects constantly with religious oppression. Born into a conservative Muslim family, her faith becomes another axis of exclusion. Hijras like Anjum, though not considered impure in the same way as menstruating women, are still not fully accepted into Islamic religious practices. The mosque and the dargah are open to her only in limited ways. The society that surrounds her reads her gender and religion not as independent features but as mutually reinforcing stigmas. Her body becomes a site on which purity, sin, and cultural contamination are negotiated. Anjum’s first experience of public humiliation and social exclusion is brutal in its simplicity. When she moved to the graveyard, “she endured months of casual cruelty like a tree would – without flinching” (Roy 9). Small boys throw stones. People scratch insults into her walls. She is called a “clown without a circus, queen without a palace” (Roy 9). These insults target not just her gender expression but the supposed inauthenticity of it. She is denied legitimacy in both masculinity and femininity. Her transformation from Aftab to Anjum becomes a political act simply by existing. The abuse she faces is not isolated. The teasing she experienced as a child, when her musical talent was mocked with cruel chants like “She-He, He-She” (Roy 15), sets the tone for a life in which she will always be seen as a deviation. Anjum tries to escape this labeling through the sanctuary of the Khwabgah, the House

of Dreams. But even within the Hijra community, the struggle to belong is tied to larger systems of religion, caste, and power. The Khwabgah, although a refuge, is not entirely free from societal pressures. It is where special people, blessed people, came with their dreams that could not be realized in the “Duniya” (Gyasi 23). The very language marks them as other, as people whose dreams are unfit for the real world.

One of the most violent illustrations of the intersection of gender and religious persecution occurs during the Gujarat riots. Anjum, trying to escape death at the hands of Hindu mobs, hides beneath corpses and pretends to be dead. When she is found, the mob is ready to kill her until someone reminds them that “killing Hijras brings bad luck” (Roy 49). She is forced to chant “Bharat Mata Ki Jai” and “Vande Mataram” (Roy 49). These slogans, symbolic of a majoritarian Hindu nationalism, are forced into her mouth. At this moment, her body is reduced to superstition. She survives not because she is a person but because her death is seen as inauspicious. This is not mercy. It is another form of dehumanization. She is left alive as “Butchers’ Luck” (Roy 49). Her existence, her survival, becomes a talisman for those who would have killed her. This experience leaves Anjum deeply changed. The violence is not only physical but existential. She is “humiliated beyond her worst nightmare” (Roy 49). The performativity of nationalism forced upon her body through slogans contrasts with the performativity of her gender. In both cases, her subjectivity is denied. She is made to mimic ideologies that reject her, simply to stay alive. Later, she teaches Zainab the Gayatri Mantra “so that in mob situations they could recite it to try to pass off as Hindu” (Roy 39). Religion becomes not a source of identity or comfort, but a survival strategy. In a country where being visibly Muslim is already dangerous, being Muslim and visibly queer is doubly deadly.

Anjum's identity as a Hijra is inseparable from her identity as a Muslim. When communal violence breaks out, "a new law was passed which allowed suspects to be detained without trial for months" (Roy 35). Prisons fill up with Muslim men. Anjum, raising Zainab, feels a moment of relief that Zainab is a girl. "It was so much safer" (Roy 35). This line highlights the selective nature of vulnerability. Muslim boys are targeted for being suspected terrorists. Hijras are targeted for existing. Anjum's relief is not a celebration of safety, but a grim realization of how survival is distributed by identity. Even within her own family, her Muslim identity does not protect her. Though her mother continues to send her food and meet her at the dargah, her father severs all ties. He cannot reconcile his religious pride and poetic heritage with the reality of his child's gender. When they pass each other on the street, they exchange glances but "never greetings" (Roy 24). Love becomes conditional, bounded by shame. In interviews, Anjum refuses to perform victimhood in the way expected of her. When journalists try to draw out stories of cruelty from her, she tells them her parents loved her. She refuses the narrative of the tragic Hijra rejected by Islam. Yet, her very existence in the margins of society challenges that love's limits. Even the Khwabgah, a space of alternative family, is framed within religious hierarchies. Hijras are allowed into certain dargahs because "unlike biological women, Hijras were not considered unclean since they did not menstruate" (Roy 21). This ironic exception does not elevate them; it reinforces their status as others. They are admitted not because they are welcome, but because they do not contaminate. Their access is granted not on human terms, but on the basis of how their bodies fit into a theology of cleanliness.

Anjum also bears witness to the spatial dimension of religious marginalization. She lives in a graveyard behind a government hospital. Her right to this land is mocked until she says, "I am not living in the graveyard, I am dying in it," claiming "authorization from the Almighty

Himself” (Roy 52). It is in this liminal space between life and death that Anjum finally finds some agency. The graveyard, a place of exclusion and waste, becomes her shelter. But even this is a negotiation with power. The municipality would not have allowed her to stay otherwise. Anjum’s existence is always conditional on being invisible, or at least harmless. Later, Jannat Guest House became a place for Hijras who “had fallen out of, or been expelled from” (Roy 53) the formal networks of the Hijra Gharanas. It is a space for those who are not even accommodated within marginality. These are bodies that the world has no place for. The fact that such a space must exist, a haven for the most marginalized among the already marginalized, shows how intersectional oppression replicates itself even within oppressed communities.

Anjum’s oppression is not simply additive. It is not the sum of being queer and Muslim. It is the compounded effect of those identities intersecting in a world that devalues both. The violence she endures is not just from individuals, but from systems: medical, legal, familial, religious and national. Anjum’s life is a constant negotiation between being folded and unfolded, between visibility and survival. Her haircut, her bureaucratic dress, her efforts to mimic dominant codes of gender or religion, are all performances. But unlike the performances that Butler describes as building normative gender, Anjum’s performances are acts of endurance. They do not earn her acceptance. They allow her to live another day. Anjum is both loved and unloved, both sacred and discarded. Her mother sometimes holds her hand at the dargah, but in public they exchange only glances. Zakir Mian travels with her despite public shame. People accept her blessings at weddings but never accept her into their homes. She becomes a living contradiction, visible but not seen, known but not acknowledged.

The novel’s inclusion of characters like Begum Zeenat Kauser and Begum Renata deepens its exploration of how gendered and religious identities intersect to create layered forms

of marginalization. Begum Zeenat, deported multiple times as a Pakistani spy, becomes a refugee in her own land. She lives near her beloved mosque but is seen as foreign, suspicious, and unpatriotic. Her Muslim identity marks her as an outsider even though she seeks no conflict, only peace and belonging. Begum Renata, a Romanian belly dancer who came to India chasing beauty and spiritual art, is sexually exploited by her Kathak teacher and reduced to an object of desire rather than a student of tradition. Her foreignness combined with her womanhood renders her vulnerable and easily dismissed.

Though neither of them is a Hijra, their identities are shaped by the intersection of religion, gender, and displacement. Like Anjum, they do not belong to the dominant narrative of the nation. Begum Zeenat's Muslim faith and Begum Renata's outsider status make them both invisible and suspect in different ways. Their lives echo Anjum's reality where being both Muslim and a Hijra means facing suspicion, humiliation, and rejection. These women, though different in background, reveal how womanhood and religious identity together often invite control, violence, or exclusion. Anjum's experience is not an exception but part of a broader pattern where the nation pushes aside those who do not match its ideal image. Each of them survives by occupying the spaces left behind by others, the spaces no one else wants, reminding us how power shapes who gets to belong and who must live on the edge.

### **Anjum's Resistance:**

Anjum's life in the novel is hard, as she faces rejection, violence and humiliation. But her story is not just about pain, It is also about strength. She does not resist with big protests or powerful speeches. Instead, she fights in small, everyday ways. She takes up space she is not supposed to. She refuses to hide. She builds a home for herself and others like her. She creates a

world where people like her can live without shame. She challenges unfair rules simply by existing on her own terms.

The first acts of resistance in Anjum's life is quiet, personal and deeply meaningful. Her resistance begins with a glance, with longing and with a decision to become someone the world tells her she cannot be. One spring morning, Aftab sees a woman in the marketplace who walks confidently in bright lipstick, high heels, and a shiny green salwar kameez. She buys bangles, hairclips, and guavas. She moves through the street without shame. Roy writes, "He wanted to be her" (19). This desire is not shallow. It is a deep act of recognition. Aftab sees not just beauty, but possibility. This is the beginning of resistance, the moment when a person sees a life they want, even if it is denied to them. This longing leads Aftab to a doorway, one that marks the entrance to the world of Hijras. This is not only a physical door. It is symbolic. It is the entrance into a life of agency, danger and truth. He follows the woman to Turkman Gate and stands for a long time outside the blue doorway. This is his first act of defiance. He steps outside the narrative given to him at birth. Though his family sees him as a boy, though his body confuses even his mother, Aftab decides to become Anjum. He claims his identity not through confrontation, but through becoming. This act echoes Judith Butler's idea that gender is performed, not inherited. Anjum does not wait for society to approve her womanhood. She performs it, lives it, insists on it.

Anjum's second act of resistance is her decision to leave her family and join the Khwabgah. The world around her has already begun to reject her. Children taunt her in school. "He's a she. He's not a he or a she. He's a he and a she. She-he, He-she, Hee Hee Hee" (Roy 15). The mocking becomes unbearable. But Anjum does not hide. She searches for others like her. The Khwabgah, which means the House of Dreams, is not a palace. It is a sanctuary for Hijras who are seen as neither man nor woman by the world. But for Anjum, it becomes a place where

she can live as herself. Her joining the Khwabgah is an act of survival, but it is also an act of resistance. She resists the shame that society tries to place on her. She chooses community over isolation and expression over silence. She accepts the rules and customs of the Khwabgah, but in doing so, she secures a space where her identity is not questioned. In this space, the rules are different. The world may call them unnatural, but here, they are whole.

Anjum's resistance also takes the form of refusing to perform the role of a victim in the way people expect. In one part of the novel, Roy writes, "In interviews Anjum would be encouraged to talk about the abuse and cruelty that her interlocutors assumed she had been subjected to by her conventional Muslim parents... They were invariably disappointed when she told them how much her mother and father had loved her" (24). Anjum refuses to confirm the outsider's story. She tells the truth of her own experience. Even though her relationship with her father became strained, she does not erase the love that once existed. This is a refusal to become a symbol of tragedy for the sake of other people's sympathy. Her relationship with her mother is subtle but strong. They "held hands surreptitiously" (Roy 24) and exchanged glances on the street without speaking. This quiet affection resists the full erasure of familial bonds. It is a reminder that love can survive even in silence. Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" echoes here. Anjum speaks. Sometimes with words. Sometimes through presence. Sometimes through resistance to the narrative others want from her.

As Anjum grows older, her resistance becomes more political. She moves into a graveyard behind a hospital. People ask if she is living there. She answers, "She told them that she wasn't living in the graveyard, she was dying in it – and for this she didn't need permission from the municipality because she had authorization from the Almighty Himself" (Roy 52). This statement carries force. She claims divine authority over her life and death. She does not ask for

acceptance. She takes it. The graveyard, a place where others see only endings, becomes a place of new beginnings. This decision is not only about survival. It is a challenge to the structures that push people like her into invisibility. The municipality does not grant her space; she takes space. The state does not give her dignity; she claims dignity. The graveyard is supposed to hold the forgotten, but Anjum makes it unforgettable. She resists invisibility by planting herself in the middle of the city, among the dead and building a new kind of life. She builds the Jannat Guest House from this space. “Gradually Jannat Guest House became a hub for Hijras who, for one reason or another, had fallen out of, or been expelled from, the tightly administered grid of Hijra Gharanas” (Roy 53). This place, named after paradise, becomes a home for the rejected. Anjum welcomes those who are cast out. This includes people of different castes, faiths and backgrounds. It includes men and women who are seen as less than human by the world. In doing this, Anjum builds a resistance not only for herself but for others.

Anjum’s resistance becomes even more layered in the context of her survival during political and religious violence. She endures the Gujarat pogrom, one of the most brutal events portrayed in the novel. Her method of survival is not through confrontation or protest, but through a painful strategy of invisibility. She lies among corpses, pretending to be dead. When the mob discovers her, they force her to chant “Bharat Mata Ki Jai” and “Vande Mataram” (Roy 49). She complies while weeping, trembling and consumed by shame. However, this moment does not reflect surrender. It is a desperate act of survival under extreme threat. The mob chooses not to kill her, not out of mercy, but because of a widespread superstition that killing a Hijra brings misfortune. As the narrator explains, “She did. Weeping, shaking, humiliated beyond her worst nightmare... Butchers’ Luck. That’s all she was” (Roy 49). Her survival, though rooted in fear and humiliation, becomes a powerful rejection of erasure. Even though this moment breaks

her spirit, it also shows her refusal to disappear. The fact that she lives is not an accident. It is her refusal to give up, even in the face of death. In Spivak's terms, Anjum speaks not with words here, but with her body. The subaltern is supposed to be silent. But Anjum lives. Her body becomes a site of resistance even when it is trembling and ashamed. She returns from that horror, changes her dress, cuts her hair and rebuilds herself.

This resistance continues in her efforts to protect Zainab. After adopting her, Anjum teaches her the Gayatri Mantra. "She had learned it while she was in the camp in Gujarat. People there said it was good to know so that in mob situations they could recite it to try to pass off as Hindu" (Roy 39). This act is not about abandoning her faith. It is about protecting life. Anjum resists religious violence by learning the language of the oppressor and using it to shield those she loves. She arms her child not with weapons but with chants. This is resistance through wisdom, through knowledge, through strategy. She knows that being Muslim is dangerous. She knows that being visibly different is dangerous. She turns this knowledge into power.

Her resistance is also shown in how she builds alternative networks of care. In the Jannat Guest House, she creates a new kind of family. It is not based on blood. It is based on need, care and shared exclusion. When people like Saddam Hussain, Revathy and others arrive, she does not ask them for documents or explanations. She understands their pain because it mirrors her own. Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality lives in this space. Everyone at Jannat has more than one reason to be marginalized. Religion, caste, gender and poverty intersect in ways that society does not want to see. Anjum does not analyze their identities. She makes space for them. This is how resistance works in her world not by theory but by shelter, by food, by safety.

Even in moments of sadness, Anjum's acts carry quiet strength. For example, when the parakeets mimic Ustad Kulsoom Bi and shout insults, mocking Anjum with "Sister-fucking Muslim Whore Hijra" (Roy 49), the mob still does not kill her. They fear bad luck. But this fear is also a form of power. Anjum becomes a symbol they cannot touch. Not because they respect her, but because they fear what she might bring. Anjum survives in the cracks of society's logic. Her body frightens the killers. Her presence unsettles the order. She even uses superstition as a shield.

Her resistance also appears in how she uses language and memory. She keeps the names and stories of those who pass through Jannat. She does not allow them to be forgotten. She does not let their stories vanish in the noise of bigger events. In a country that often erases the poor, the queer, the religious minorities and the lower castes, Anjum builds a house of memory. She remembers those who died. She protects those who live. She becomes an archivist of the unwanted. This work of remembering is political. It is spiritual. It is deeply resistant.

Another key aspect of Anjum's resistance is how she redefines the idea of family and home. She tells people she is not living in the graveyard but dying in it. That statement shifts the meaning of home. For Anjum, home is not a house with walls. It is a space where she can be fully herself, even if that space is surrounded by tombs. She does not wait for society to accept her. She creates a world where she belongs. Her life challenges the dominant idea of what it means to be a citizen, a woman, a Muslim, a person. At one point, Begum Zeenat Kauser is described as someone who survived multiple deportation attempts and lived in Shahjahanabad in a tiny room with a kitchen and a view of her beloved mosque. Like Anjum, she finds a way to stay rooted in the city. These characters resist being pushed out. They resist being labelled as outsiders. They stay, they endure and they reclaim small spaces as their own.

Anjum does not change the world with loud protests. She changes the world by refusing to leave it. She speaks in ways that Spivak would call difficult to hear. Her words are not always meant for the public. But her actions are loud enough. Anjum is not a character who waits to be rescued. She does the rescuing. She rescues herself. She rescues others. She builds where there is no foundation. She makes family where there is no blood. She survives where survival is seen as impossible. Her story shows us that resistance is not always in breaking down the system. Sometimes it is in building something outside it. Sometimes it is in living a full life when the world tells you that you are unworthy of one.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study has shown how race, gender and religion intersect in powerful ways to shape the lives of marginalized characters in *Homegoing* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. By using the intersectionality theory of Kimberlé Crenshaw and the ideas of Spivak and Butler, this research has explored how characters like Effia, H and Anjum experience oppression in ways that are not simple or one-dimensional. Their suffering comes not just from one part of their identity but from how different parts of their identity come together and create deeper forms of marginalization. Effia lives in a system where her body is controlled by both African patriarchy and European colonialism. She is silenced, yet she passes on her culture and memories in small and quiet ways. H is born into a world that says he is free, but his Blackness and manhood make him a target of racial violence and forced labor. Even though he is denied dignity, he continues to fight, to build and to remember. Anjum, as a Muslim Hijra in modern India, faces violence from society and from the state. She is insulted, excluded and nearly erased. Yet she refuses to disappear. She builds a home in a graveyard, gathers people who are also rejected and creates a life where she can protect others like her. These acts of survival are also acts of resistance. They show that even when systems try to crush people, those people find ways to push back, to speak, to remember and to live.

This study also shows how intersecting oppression works in different social, political and geographic settings, and how people of many gender identities may face discrimination because of other parts of who they are, such as race or religion, making this research more inclusive and aware of diverse experiences. The characters in these novels do not follow the usual paths of protest or rebellion. Instead, their resistance is deeply personal. It shows up in their memories, in their parenting, in their relationships, in their spiritual practices and in the spaces they choose to

claim as their own. This study proves that resistance is not always loud. Sometimes it lives in small acts that keep identity alive. These novels also show how history, culture and politics shape the way people are treated. From slavery and colonialism to religious riots and gender policing, the systems may change, but the pain continues. Still, the human spirit finds ways to resist. The study also reveals that characters with overlapping identities are often misunderstood by the world and even by scholars. Many past studies have looked at these characters from one angle. They saw race or gender or religion, but not all of them together. This research has tried to look at the full picture. It has shown that only by seeing the whole person can we begin to understand their struggles. Intersectionality is not just a theory. It is a way to see the world more clearly. It helps us notice the pain that others miss and the strength that many ignore. Through the stories of Effia, H and Anjum, this study has shown that literature can give voice to the silenced, space to the rejected and hope to those who live on the edge. These stories ask readers to see beyond labels, to listen more closely and to never forget that every identity carries a story that deserves to be told and remembered.

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