

# Medical Humanism in Vikas Swarup's the Accidental Apprentice and Arundhati Roy's the Ministry of Utmost Happiness

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## **Abstract:**

The paper aims to focus on an interwoven between Medical and Humanism. The term "Medical Humanism" is an Umbrella term. At this phase, when Vikas Swarup's *The Accidental Apprentice* and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* appears to be more an existing reality through the various incidents and how Medical Humanism interrelated to Medical Mafia, health care with honesty, empathy, compassion, altruism, respect to dignity and beliefs of the patients and their families. The emerging era is interlinked with Science spills and also influences its literature. Various literary fictions reflect simply mirroring the facts and reproduce the scientific knowledge.

**Keywords:** Medical Mafia, Health Care With Honesty, Empathy, Compassion, Respect To Dignity

I have taken example from Vikas Swarup's *The Accidental Apprentice* (2013) how far the concept of Medical Humanism interlinked with the relevant incidents. Sapna approached Dr. Mittal for her mother's kidney problem. Dr. Mittal took all basic tests and informed Sapna that her mother was suffering from chronic diabetes that had led to kidney failure. He explained to her that her kidneys function at less than fifteen per cent of their normal capacity. So they needed to transplant her kidney. Sapna decided to give her kidney but Neha did not agree to donate her kidney. When Sapna and Neha met to convey their decision to Dr. Mittal, the ward boy Tilak Raj told them that they could buy a kidney and gave them the address of Dr. J. K. Nath, working at Unity Kidney Institute owned by MLA Anwar Noorani.

When Sapna asked Dr. Nath whether taking other's kidney was legal, he explained her Human Organ Transplantation Act 1994. When the doctor told them that a kidney costs six lakh rupees and Neha began bargaining and the doctor agreed for two lakh rupees. Dr. Nath who admired Neha's beauty reduced the cost of kidney. Modern era hospital accepts a large sum of money from the patients though they did not bother about patient welfare. Thus the famous proverb is apt in the context "Money makes many things."

Neha was not able to collect the money from her friends and as a last resort went to Karan. He wanted to exploit her sexually but Neha offered to accept a kiss. But she did not tell Sapna how she got the money. Sapna wanted to meet the kidney donor Sita out of curiosity. From Sita she understood that donors like her got only a few thousand rupees. Sapna found that there were poor people who need money. Therefore they sold their kidneys for a few thousand rupees to save their children and families. Sapna

understood that it was a kidney harvesting business protected by MLA Noorani. This event resembles Robin Cook's *Coma* (1977) which is about Susan Wheeler, twenty-three years old third year medical student working as a trainee at Boston Memorial hospital. She finds out organ harvesting happened in the hospital sheltered by chief doctor, Mark Bellows. Fact and fiction are thickly mingled with each other. The British writer, Rana Dasgupta says: "I [Dasgupta] worked with an anaesthetist who was involved in a big kidney transplantation racket in Delhi. Kidney transplantation is very easy. . . Add to that a lot of poor people willing to sell a kidney and the outcome is obvious" (113-114). For example, A.R. Murugadass's Tamil film, *Ramanaa* (2002) is about the various levels of corruption in Indian society. The protagonist, Ramanaa discovers that hospital officials often engage in illegal organ harvesting. He takes action against the authorities.

Sapna also found Tilak Raj there and understood that he was a commission agent. Later, Sapna decided not to go for kidney transplant and demanded money back. But the hospital authorities were not ready to refund the amount. Sapna exposes the kidney harvest business at the Unity Kidney Institute with the help of the media. She projects that health sector is also commercialized in the postmillennial times. She illustrates the pathetic situation of the poor who sell their organs to save themselves from an economic crisis. So the hospital was sealed, and doctors and the MLA were arrested.

I have taken another example novel from Arundathi Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) how far the concept of Medical Humanism interlinked with the relevant incidents. Anjum alais Aftab was the fourth child of Jahanara Begum and Mulaquat Ali in Shahjahanabad, Delhi. Begum expected a boy baby but was 'cursed' with a girl child. Unfortunately, Aftab was a hermaphrodite. Dr Ghulam Nabi, aSexologist examined the child and said: "Aftab was not, medically speaking, a Hijra—a female trapped in a male body . . . a rare example of a Hermaphrodite, with both male and female characteristics though outwardly, the male characteristics appeared to be more dominant" (*MUH* 16-17). Her father decided to do operation for Aftab for which he collected money from the relatives and neighbours. Meanwhile, Aftab started to learn singing because he had a sweet voice. As his fellow-students teased him, he decided to quit singing class. He was totally inspired by the transgender called 'Bombay Silks' and followed her and entered into Khwabgah, House of Dream, a community of Hijras. He could not tolerate the biological changes that were taking place in his body, "His body had suddenly begun to wage war on him" (*MUH* 23-24). His life transformed as he entered the doorstep of Khwabgah and changed his name from Aftab to Anjum.

Hijras are part of the city life. Hijras are perpetual victims of social and cultural prohibition in the society. They are often discriminated and humiliated, particularly in the Southern region of the country. This is one of the reasons behind their migration to the Northern cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Pune and Kolkata. Arundhati Roy's Anjum hails from Shahjahanabad in Delhi and moves to central junction, Khwabgah, Delhi. She finds out her own community. This story is similar to Living Simile Vidya's *I Am Vidya: A Transgender Journey* (2013) in which she undertakes a journey from Chennai to Pune to become a member of the Hijra community. Likewise, A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010) deals with the life of transgender, A. Revathi decides to run away from her hometown in Salem to Delhi where she meets a group of people belonging to Hijra community. So she decides to

live with them. Hijras move to urban centres because they join their community and live with them. Their hometown is hostile to them, so they migrate to the city and form a community.

Aftab met other Hijras from different castes but they mingled with each other. Kulsoon Bi, head of the Khwabgah suggested that Anjum go through a Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) that would enable her to confront the gender depression that aggrieved her. Anjum was operated on by doctor Mukhtar who agreed to: “remove her male parts and try to enhance her existing vagina. He also suggested pills that would un-deepen her voice and help her develop breasts” (MUH 28).

Caste distinctions do not disappear even in the hospitals. Anjum and Zainab sought refuge in a graveyard. Anjum met Saddam Hussein, a young boy who initially served at a mortuary. Saddam shared his thoughts with Anjum about his disgusting job experiences. He worked in the mortuary where he saw doctors, especially Hindu doctors’ discrimination between upper and lower caste. He said:

The Hindu doctors who were required to conduct post-mortems thought of themselves as upper caste and would not touch dead bodies for fear of being polluted. The man who actually handled the cadavers and performed the post-mortems were employed as cleaners and belonged to a caste of sweepers and leatherworkers who used to be called Chamars. The doctors, like most Hindu, looked down on them and considered them to be Untouchable. The doctors would stand at a distance with handkerchiefs masking their noses and shout instructions to the staff. . . (MUH 72-73)

Roy also exposes some of the hospital officials’ theft of organs in the name of post-mortems. Physicians are generally held in high esteem as life savers but today such doctors practise unethically and fall victim to commercialisation of health sector. Anwar Bhai runs a brothel nearby on MG Road. Rubina was one among the girls in the brothel who suddenly died of burst appendix: “They were all distressed and agitated, not just by Rubina’s passing, but also because the hospital returned her body with the eyes missing. The hospital said that rats had got to them in the mortuary” (MUH 78). Roy sarcastically exposes hospitals in the Postmillennial Era. These are the unpleasant circumstances which forced Saddam Hussein to abandon that job. He began to work at various other places. He worked as a security guard service called Safe n’ Sound Guard Service (SSGS) which exploits Saddam. So he did not give any appropriate reason to quit the job. Finally, he took shelter in the Jannat Guest House and accompanied Anjum and launched the Jannat Funeral Services.

The two novelists Vikas Swarup and Arundhati Roy, have taken up contemporary real life issues that the people come across in their daily life. All the two novels, *The Accidental Apprentice* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* project these real life issues mixed with the fictional elements. The two novelists are products of the postmillennial world and so make accurate portrayals of the current health care centres. The unexpected predicaments—physical, social, and psychological—are met with the reality in the medical field.

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