

Reconfiguring Discourses of Human Rights and Development in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

Crystal Baines

Abstract:

This paper explores the complex reconfigurations of liberal humanitarianism within South Asian urban development projects depicted in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). It is easy to discount human rights as an American and/or European concept which in the post-cold war global economy has conflated into liberal humanitarianism. Such liberal humanitanianisms, according to Crystal Parikh in *Writing Human Rights*, "evacuates political subjectivity and social desire from those whom it addresses, ascribing to them instead abject victimhood" (Parikh 2017, 3). The implication of this form of humanitarianism is that the prerequisite to victimhood is the obscuration of the individual's right to have rights, and the simplistic acknowledgment of victims as human beings that need saving. However, this discourse of liberal humanitarianism drastically reconfigures itself in its adopted geo-political landscapes outside Euro-American shores. What happens to first world discourses of human rights within postcolonial and decolonial discourses of development in South Asia? This paper considers how in the novel, the narrative of the "white (western) man's new burden" when replaced with the "developing brown man's burden of national development", reconfigures the very alien discourse of western human rights within postcolonial, decolonial trajectories of globalisation. This paper argues that in the obliteration of one's position as political subject, victim, and even human within the South Asian state's sprint to shed the stigma of "underdevelopment", alternative subjecthoods that refuse to be "saved" emerge, suggesting the need for new theoretical and practical frameworks to examine the humanitarian and development discourses within South Asia.

Keywords: human rights, development, liberal humanitarianism, neo-liberalism, North India