



Need for Economic Emancipation of Women: Changing face of Women in the Novels of Arundhati Roy

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Abstract

The economic emancipation of women takes women empowerment in an absolute sense. The equality of men and women in the workplace is about work distribution and financial equality. Equality also lies in meeting the professional demands and rewards one achieves in the workplace. In India, it has been a trend for Indian women to leave their professional careers to meet family demands, and women only must sacrifice their professional careers for centuries. It is indeed questionable. Indian English fiction, since its birth, has presented the plight of women in society and has portrayed the status of women. With the shift of time, Indian novelist has shifted their focal point more to the economic empowerment of women as economic emancipation is the ultimate growth as it enhances the possibility to face the world with courage and confidence. The issue raised by the classic feminist writer Virginia Woolf and the metaphor "The women must have money and a room if she is to write fiction" indicates the space and monetary freedom women must get if she is to equate men. The paper aims to trace the need for economic freedom for women for the development of a country and the light of the consequences the women characters face due to lack of economic freedom in *The God of Small Things* and how with the change of time, women of Arundhati Roy in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* showcases a paradigm shift and meets the challenges of life and intermits submitting themselves with mute resignation to male supremacy.

Introduction

Since remote ages, women in India have been considered *Shakti*. In The Vedic period, no discrimination was practised between boys and girls. The girls got all the opportunities like boys regarding education or social position. Women's declining state was marked during the post-Vedic period, and women were deprived of education and every pleasure of life. Women were positioned as 'other' and were expected to be an obedient wives, of a wife beater or a sadist husband. She was inculcated to be an ideal woman with immense tolerance and submissiveness. The women suffered for no fault and were subjected to self-sacrifice. The ameliorated status of women came with the freedom movement in India. The sidelined sections of society raised their voice for various legal rights, and this brought in facilities for women which was the ultimate stage of upliftment. With the advent of the feminist movement in India, the theme of self-identity, the quest for identity or awareness to balance between tradition and modernity, occupied the works of writers. The fictional works of Indian writers resonated with women's individuality and economic freedom and their existence in society. The metaphor "A woman must have money and a room of one's own if she is to write fiction." is troublesome and liberating. This short statement in Virginia Woolf's work, *A Room of One's Own*, throws light on the long history of oppression and dependence women have constantly been subjected to also talks about women's acceptance as the second sex, which was not restricted to a particular realm but the status of 'other' was worldwide. Malala Yousufzai is confident that the two potent weapons are sword and pen, but the third is the strongest, and that is women. Men can win no fight without the support and participation of women.

The paper aims to trace the need for the economic emancipation of women in general. The two-generation women characters in Arundhati Roy's debut novel *The God of Small Things*, the recipient of the prestigious Booker Prize in 1997, illustrate the necessity of freedom of women through their status that talks of the mute submission of the females to societal norms and male dominance under which they overlooked their need for self-identity. Roy talks of three generation women in the book, among which the first two generations Mammachi and her daughter Ammu are the victim of oppression and remain in the dark shade of patriarchy. The author skillfully depicts the consequence of women who remained inside the periphery of the line drawn by the male members of the family and never thought to be economically independent or instead were not allowed to get the space to think of their economic emancipation. Though Mammachi effectively ran the pickle factory, and many women workers benefitted, she could not counter Chacko when the factory ownership was silently transferred in his name. Roy's second novel, which appeared after twenty years, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, tells the tale of a fragmented nation. The author brings in a densely populated character book, and it is as haphazard as the nation was in the 1990s. However, Roy has sketched strong women characters, Anjum and Tilottama and Maryam, mother of Tilo, who are bold and face the adverse situations that come along their journey and who are independent and capable of building their life on their terms.

Meaning of Economic Emancipation

Enabling women with greater empowerment means increasing their right to economic resources and giving them control and the right on the decisions that will benefit the whole women's community. This includes freedom to their own time and access to markets. The more the empowerment more elevated the status is. Gender inequality hinders progress and has been a more significant issue in third-world countries, considering the prevalence of cultural norms and heightened preference towards the male gender. A study highlights that gender inequality hinders economic growth globally and undoubtedly hinders the growth of women. *Economic freedom* is the path that boots positive outcomes and is a way towards social development. If women get education opportunities and become economically strong, it will contribute to a nation's growth.

Moreover a women with economic freedom secure a place and say in the social sphere. It gives women confidence and enables them to fight against the odds of life. In literature, freedom and equality of women are incorporated with feminism.

Movements for betterment of women and need for economic emancipation

Women's movements in the last quasi-century have made major gaining points to formulate policies that will benefit women equally. These movements focused more on women's education with a belief in overall development and women being at par with men. Regarding the health sector, investment in mothers' health is the improvement that resulted in longer lives and lowered population growth. The aftermath of these movements was that the education domain strengthened, and women were at par with men. Besides, women gained economic freedom in many countries. However, they have been left behind by unequal wages and income in India. This is because women are seldom counted in during the drafting of economic policies. The reality is that women's work is never fully gauged, and consequently, their contribution to any work, whether paid or unpaid, tends to be undervalued. Hence this situation leads to the need for economic emancipation of women. Making women economically empowered is essential as it is one of the finest ways to recognize their potential and practice their rights.

With the recognition of true potential, there is gradual improvement in social status, and freedom of choice of living follows effortlessly. Economic freedom helps to come out from susceptible states and accentuate improving the standard of living, henceforth contributing to a making of a mighty nation.

Role of an Author

Looking into reality, the authors have described fact with fiction and shaped the work into novels or stories. It is the medium through which the novelist's aware people of the society they live in and introduces the deficiency that hinders the growth of an individual and the society through the characters sculpted and the social sphere around them. Indeed, a nation's growth is directly linked with the growth of every individual in a country, and the writers express the consequences through their works. In this, many writers have highlighted the situations that have created a vacuum in a society, for instance, the society that was overshadowed by the caste system, and writers like Mulk Raj Anand or Raja Rao showcased in their works creating a character as representative telling the odds of society. Henceforth authors play a vital role in making the people know the facts that need to be looked after and thereby bring change in society through a protest in their writings against the system. The author's intentions to retell the dark side of the social sphere can be gauged as bringing reformation by highlighting issues ingrained in society and gradually spreading its hands to make it disabled. If we look at the government's initiatives from time to time, it has brought policies for upgrading its system for a smooth run and the betterment of its people.

Nevertheless, less attention was given to women as restrictions were imposed in the social sphere, and gender roles played a pivotal part. Recently, **the** National Education Policy 2020 has envisioned equal access to education irrespective of gender and has emphasized quality education that aims to skill India. The government takes various other initiatives for a better India to uplift women and facilitate them with jobs. Irrespective of all these initiations, the writers also play an expressive role in creating awareness, and the power of the pen has always won the heart of the readers, which helped them to bring to light the unknown facts. The Indian women writers have depicted the plight of women through the narratives in their fictional work that prevailed in the era to which they belonged and insisted reformation.

Predicament of Women in the Works of Indian Women Writers

Women in India are designated as *devi*. Great esteem, denoting them as an incarnation of deities, is indeed impressive to note. However, the picture is bizarre and gloomy when looking at the age-old torture of mental, physical and emotional women. Women were deprived of education, wherein men were provided with all facilities and prerogatives, ensuring male societal supremacy. Women's prime job was to satisfy men's needs and help to maintain the male ego that reaffirmed their authority. In the first part of the twentieth century, Indian women writers depicted a diversified picture of women that restricted their freedom in participating in social and political affairs and permitted to be confined at home, indicating that somehow the women needed to be liberated from the mental fear and the routine practice of enslavement. The galaxy of writers of the later part of the twentieth century have, by and large, painted the injustice women faced in society; these novels have women as central characters that showcase feminist undercurrent. The women characters are rebellious and are not submitting. The idea of being submissive and bearing suffering is transformed into a determined woman who does not succumb to social norms, and the authors present a liberal and unconventional woman. Women in Nayantara Sehgal's novel are more liberal and unconventional. "Sehgal's women seek to establish a new order with changed standards where women can be their true selves

where there is no need for hypocrisy and where the character is judged by the purity of heart" (qtd. in Tiwari 20). The women character Saroj and Smriti in the novels *Storm in Chandigarh* and *The Day in Shadow* Saroj discards acceptable social norms, and the Smriti longing for accessible communication with her husband turns out to be disastrous. Shashi Deshpande's women are educated and, henceforth, self-conscious. Saru's sarcastic lecture to the school girls about the social rules for women in *The Dark Holds No Terror* is that women get married and bear children, women should be less qualified, less heightened, and less earning than men if she wants to enjoy a happy married life and Saru consider so-called equality as nonsense.

According to Saru, the words 'economic independence' and 'self-identity' are to be forgotten. Women writers in this era gave strong women characters, and Kamala Markandya's Rukmini in *Nectar in a Sieve*, despite her husband's unfaithfulness, economic turmoil, and disobedience of children, remained bold. Rukmini exhibits remarkable strength to face the strange happenings in her life. On a similar note Anita Desai, a prominent star in the galaxy and her noteworthy contribution to Indian English fiction, her women characters are liberated and conscious of her essentiality to live for themselves. The character Nanda Kaul in *Fire and The Mountain* lived a pseudo-status and survived in mock happiness and enjoying silence within herself. Her women have individual identities and are mentally advanced. Henceforth to infer the writers have showcased the suppressed world of women, who demanded liberation and painted characters that yearn to come out of the shackle of social barriers and live with individual identities.

Women Deprived of Economic Emancipation in *The God of Small Things*

In the book *The God of Small Things*, the Booker Prize author Arundhati Roy has shown three generations of women and has distinctly sketched their status, which has varied with time. Baby Kochhama, though, received an education but stayed at home as the father could not get a suitor for her. She was allowed to receive a course in University - "since couldn't have a husband there is no harm in her having an education" (Roy 26), indicating a woman has all freedom in her parents' house only and should be lesser in all aspects than men if she wants to get a suitable husband. The Baby was instrumental in inflicting pain in the twins' lives, as she was idle and preferred to remain occupied in manipulations in other's life. Baby never dreamt of living an independent life and earning a living; instead accepted the life of a parasite and happily destroyed the life of Ammu and the twins. Roy painted the picture of a family where an unmarried daughter who has no intentions of self-dependence, which can be achieved only by becoming economically strong, stays in her brother's family and ruins another's life. Baby Kochamm was aimless of her future and could not think of a life better than this.

Mammachi is another women character in the first generation. She had to bear the beatings of her husband. Despite having the talent to play the violin, Mammachi is cornered by her husband. Henceforth, her lessons are discontinued, a state of Indian women where they are expected to crush their desire and freedom of living is restricted to household chores. Apart from her husband's beatings and physical torture, her adept business skills were deprived of encouragement by the male members of the house. Mammachi's wish to be self-dependent and start a pickle factory ended as it hurt the esteem of a high-ranking ex- govt officer and the son who wanted to earn more profit though the mother was doing good with her pickle-making skills. The male supremacy overpowered Mammachi's talent, and it was hammered and confined inside and granted more to Chacko's needs.

Ammu's decision to escape from her father's grip and hasty marriage to a Bengali Hindu creates a drift in the Ipe family. Breaking social norms and marrying outside the community made the twins and Ammu stand alone, having no "Locus Stand I". In the autobiographical tone of

creating a Hindu husband of a Syrian Christian wife, the author depicts the status of a woman that prevailed and the consequences Ammu had to bear who dared to break the love laws made by the society and had to stand separate to face the challenges the life bestowed on her. What Ammu faced would not have been if she had monetary freedom. She would have a free life and must not have to return to her parental house, where she and her twins were unwanted. Restrictions imposed on her by the family and society and the insult she had to tolerate by the inspector are indicative of a women's need for economic freedom and the importance of women's education. Ammu deserved a better life had she been sent for higher education like her brother Chacko. The consequence Ammu faced is due to lack of education which would have given her an uplifted status and made her self-dependent. She would not have to face the abuse of her husband, who wanted her to please Mr Hollick for his promotion. Arundhati Roy hints at the consequence of women's lack of proper education in the novel. He highlights the ignorance of a well-educated father who wants her daughter to remain at home and declines to send her distance for higher education.

The daughter of the Syrian Christian Ammu is also deprived of gaining the right over her parental property as they do not have the right to avail of the privilege. Arundhati has incorporated a situation in the novel that existed and for which her mother, Mary Roy, fought and eventually won the case in the Supreme Court to give equal rights to a son and a daughter of a father's property. She portrays a pathetic state of Ammu in how Pappachi, the father, and the brother Chacko, ignore her and Pappachi to educate Ammu to a level where she can be independent, whereas Chacko becomes a Rhodes Scholar. The author depicts the irony of a woman facing discrimination who deserves a better life. However, the so-called educated ignorant parents fail to fathom the future of a girl who needs a respectable place in society which is possible through monetary independence. Rahel representing the third generation is free to choose the husband of her choice and the profession of her desire. Though she spent her childhood without love and care, this state made her more determined and carefree. She is more confident and does not want to have a life of Mammachi and Ammu. She has been rebellious since her childhood and protests the orthodoxies of society. The generation gap is well portrayed by Roy, where Rahel is free to fulfil her desire, but the sequence of tragic incidents in her life broke her completely, again, it is observed that she had the monetary freedom that accentuated her confidence to take the right decision in her life. Roy is evident with her views on the value of educating a daughter, and she has illustrated it by showing the life of Rahel.

Economic emancipation of women in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

Set in contemporary India, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* provides a nuanced portrayal of women's economic struggles, often bound by societal norms and gender expectations. The novel introduces us to a diverse cast of female characters, each navigating their unique circumstances. Anjum, a transgender woman, seeks autonomy by establishing her guesthouse in a graveyard, defying societal expectations "once again Anjum entered another world. It was an unprepossessing graveyard" (Roy 57-58). However, she faces economic challenges due to the marginalized status of transgender individuals in Indian society. Anjum's pursuit of economic independence reflects the resilience and determination of women to overcome societal barriers.

Similarly, the character of Tilo, an architect-turned-activist, embodies the complexities of economic freedom for women. Tilo's involvement in social and political movements is driven by her desire to challenge oppressive systems. Despite her educated background and activism, Tilo experiences economic constraints, working multiple jobs to sustain herself. Her struggle highlights the prevalent issue of economic inequality women face, even those who are educated and politically engaged.

The novel also explores the intersectionality of economic freedom and caste dynamics. For instance, the character of Miss Jebeen the Second, a young Dalit girl, embodies the challenges faced by marginalized communities. Her mother works as a domestic help, trapped in a cycle of low-wage labour due to her caste. The novel exposes the deeply ingrained inequality within Indian society, where economic opportunities are limited for specific castes and women alike. However, amid these challenges, the novel also showcases moments of agency and empowerment for women. The character of Tilottama, or Tilo, the central protagonist, exemplifies the pursuit of economic freedom through her determination and entrepreneurial spirit. Despite her hardships, she establishes a small enterprise crafting handmade paper products, finding a niche market and creating employment opportunities for other women. Tilo's entrepreneurial journey symbolizes the resilience and resourcefulness of women who strive to create economic agency in the face of adversity.

Moreover, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* portrays women engaging in informal economies to assert economic independence. The character of Anjum, in her quest for autonomy, establishes a community of hijra individuals within the graveyard. They create their own economic ecosystem, embroidering shrouds and providing services to mourners. While these activities exist on the fringes of society, they represent a form of economic empowerment for marginalized women who find alternative means to sustain themselves.

The novel also sheds light on the importance of education in enabling economic freedom for women. The character of Miss Jebeen the Second, despite her disadvantaged background, exhibits intellectual curiosity and an eagerness to pursue education. Education is portrayed as a potential avenue for uplifting women from poverty and empowering them economically. By highlighting the transformative power of education, the novel emphasizes the significance of providing equal access to educational opportunities for all women.

Paradigm shift of women in Arundhati Roy's novels

Arundhati Roy, a renowned Indian author, has played a significant role in portraying the paradigm shift of women in her novels. Through her powerful storytelling, Roy challenges traditional gender roles, explores women's agency, and addresses social and political issues affecting women. In this essay, we will discuss the paradigm shift of women in Arundhati Roy's novels, focusing on two of her most notable works, "The God of Small Things" and "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness."

"The God of Small Things," Roy's debut novel, challenges societal norms and patriarchal structures by presenting female characters who defy traditional expectations. The novel primarily revolves around the lives of the twins Rahel and Estha and their mother, Ammu. Roy skillfully explores the constraints imposed on women within a highly conservative society where gender roles are rigidly defined.

Ammu, a divorced woman and a single mother, epitomizes the changing paradigm of women in Roy's novel. She defies societal expectations by seeking personal happiness and fulfilling her desires. Ammu's relationship with Velutha, an Untouchable man, represents a rebellion against the profoundly ingrained caste and class hierarchies in Indian society. Through Ammu's character, Roy challenges the oppressive norms restricting women's autonomy and choices, emphasizing their right to pursue love and happiness.

The novel also highlights the agency of female characters in shaping their own lives. Rahel, one of the central characters, rebels against traditional gender roles and expectations. She challenges societal conventions through her friendship with Velutha and refusal to conform to societal norms. Rahel's character represents the paradigm shift of women as she asserts her individuality and rejects the limitations imposed on her by society.

"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" continues the exploration of women's changing roles and agency in Roy's works. The novel introduces a diverse range of female characters who challenge traditional gender norms and actively participate in shaping their destinies. Anjum, a transgender woman, establishes her own space in a graveyard and creates a community for hijras. Her character represents the marginalized and often silenced voices of transgender individuals, challenging societal norms and demanding recognition and acceptance.

Tilo, the novel's central protagonist, further exemplifies the paradigm shift of women. She is an architect-turned-activist who engages in political movements and fights against oppressive systems. Tilo's character portrays a woman who actively works towards social change and challenges the status quo. Through her agency and activism, Tilo embodies the transformation of women from passive victims to active agents of change.

Roy's novels also shed light on the intersectionality of women's experiences, addressing issues of caste, class, and religion. In both novels, she emphasizes the importance of solidarity among women and the need to dismantle oppressive systems collectively. Roy portrays female characters forming alliances and supporting each other, showcasing the power of sisterhood and collective action.

Furthermore, Roy's novels highlight the impact of social and political issues on women's lives. From the caste-based discrimination faced by characters like Velutha in "The God of Small Things" to the communal tensions and violence in "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness," Roy depicts the interconnectedness of gender with other forms of oppression. She highlights the urgent need for women to navigate and challenge these intersecting power systems.

Conclusion

In *The God of Small Things*, the need for economic freedom is conveyed through the narrative of the women characters. The author reports female characters' struggles and how they navigate through a male-dominated society that relegates them to a subaltern status. Nevertheless, women find ways to empower themselves amidst social constraints through economic independence. The character Mammachi's successful run of the Pickle factory is an instance of Roy's women's resilience to have financial autonomy, despite the overpowering of male figures in the family. Ammu breaking her abusive marriage is another instance of challenging the traditional notion of women's dependency on men. She asserts her right to freedom in her life, her decision of whom to love and how much and stay a life with autonomy.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness explores the theme of economic freedom for women through a diverse range of characters and their experiences. It delves into the challenges women face due to societal norms, economic inequality, and caste dynamics. However, the novel also highlights the agency and resilience of women, showcasing their pursuit of economic independence through entrepreneurship, informal economies, and education. Through its nuanced portrayal of women's economic struggles and triumphs, the novel offers a profound exploration of the multifaceted nature of economic freedom for women in contemporary India. Arundhati Roy's novels present a paradigm shift in the depiction of women. Through her powerful storytelling, Roy challenges traditional gender roles, explores women's agency, and addresses social and political issues affecting women. Her characters defy societal norms, assert their individuality, and actively participate in shaping their lives. By portraying the complexities of women's experiences and advocating for solidarity and collective action, Roy's novels contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality and social justice.

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