



CHALLENGING THE PATRIARCHAL ORDER: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS AND THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS

Charu Mathur

Research Scholar

Department of Social Science and
Humanities

Lords University, Alwar.

Mathurcharu98@gmail.com

Dr. Neetu Yadav

Research Supervisor

Department of Social Science and
Humanities

Lords University, Alwar.

ABSTRACT

*Arundhati Roy has emerged as one of the most potent voices in contemporary Indian literature, consistently challenging the socio-political hierarchies entrenched in the post-colonial landscape. While her works are often celebrated for their political critique of globalization and caste, this paper explores the distinct feminist vision embedded within her major novels, *The God of Small Things* (1997) and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). By examining the intersectional nature of female subjugation—where patriarchy, caste, and religious dogmas converge—this paper argues that Roy's female characters are not merely victims; they are transgressive agents who redefine boundaries of morality, gender, and belonging.*

Keywords: Challenging , socio-political, hierarchies, morality, gender, female subjugation

1. INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy's literary oeuvre is a site of resistance against the "Love Laws" that govern who should be loved and how. Her feminist vision is not one of monolithic empowerment but a nuanced exploration of the "Small Things"—the domestic, the silenced, and the marginalized. In the patriarchal structure of Kerala (in *The God of Small Things*) and the turbulent political climate of Kashmir and Old Delhi (in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*), Roy presents women who navigate the crushing weight of systemic oppression through endurance, transgression, and self-reclamation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Iftikhar, Rukhsana in 'Indian Feminism: Class, Gender and Identity in Medieval ages' (2016) talks about the miseries and suffering of Indian women with respect to their social class structure. In this book women of elite classes in the middle ages such as Razyia and Noor Jahan are discussed. Women were treated as private property in medieval India.



Kindersley, Dorling and McCann, Hannah in 'The Feminism Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained' (2019) gives detail on women's organizations and movements in UK and 8 European Union. The definition of feminism in this book is inclusive. It is focused on the pursuit of the goal of gender equality by individuals, groups, projects and governmental programmes but it expands so as to encompass the wider goal of the advancement of women.

Investigated by **Madhumati, Adhikari** (2021), 'In Desai's novels, the moral values of women are conveniently changed to suit the demands of man who treat them as their object; possession to be ruled and controlled by psychological insecurity nurtured in them through myths, customs and social discourses.'

3. THE TRANSGRESSIVE WOMAN IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

In *The God of Small Things*, the feminist struggle is framed through the lens of domestic entrapment.

- **Ammachi and Rahel:**

Ammu, the protagonist, represents the woman who refuses to abide by the conservative expectations of a Syrian Christian family. Her love affair with Velutha, an Untouchable, is a radical act of rebellion that defies both patriarchal control and the rigid structure of the caste system. Roy suggests that in a society governed by the "Love Laws," a woman's autonomy is the ultimate threat to the status quo.

- **The Loss of Subjectivity:**

Rahel, the daughter, embodies the psychological trauma of witnessing the erasure of female agency. Roy portrays the "smallness" of the lives of women as a byproduct of a society that renders their desires invisible. The novel is a critique of how traditional structures systematically dismantle the female self, yet it remains a testament to the enduring bond between mother and daughter, which survives even after the mother's destruction.

4. QUEER FEMINISM AND FLUIDITY IN *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

With *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy expands her feminist lens to include the transgender experience, thereby deconstructing the binary of male/female essentialism.



- **Anjum (Aftab):**

Anjum is arguably Roy's most significant contribution to feminist discourse. By living in a *kinnar* commune (the Khwabgah), Anjum creates a space of resistance against patriarchal definitions of womanhood and motherhood. Her journey from being born as Aftab to adopting the identity of Anjum is an act of reclaiming the body from a society that seeks to categorize and discipline it.

- **Tilo and Individual Agency:**

Tilottama, the female lead, represents the nomadic, intellectual woman who refuses to be owned by any man, state, or ideology. Her decision to raise a child amidst the violence of Kashmir acts as a profound feminist statement: the refusal to surrender one's nurturing capacity to the machinery of war.

5. INTERSECTIONALITY: CASTE, CLASS, AND PATRIARCHY

Roy's feminist vision is inherently intersectional. She posits that the oppression of women cannot be decoupled from their socio-economic standing. In *The God of Small Things*, the tragedy of Ammu is inextricably linked to her lack of property rights and her status as a divorced woman in a patriarchal village. In *The Ministry*, the characters reside in a graveyard, a liminal space that reflects their marginalization from the 'Mainstream.' Roy's vision suggests that true liberation for women is impossible without the dismantling of the caste and social hierarchies that provide patriarchy its foundational support.

6. CONCLUSION

Arundhati Roy's feminist vision is transformative rather than transformatory. She does not offer easy solutions or happy endings; instead, she offers a vision of survival. Her protagonists, whether Ammu, Rahel, Anjum, or Tilo inhabit a world that is fundamentally hostile to their existence. Through their stories, Roy forces the reader to confront the violence of patriarchal norms. By documenting the "Small Things" and the "Ministry" of the forgotten, Roy reclaims the narrative power for women and the marginalized, asserting that there is strength in the very act of existing outside the boundaries set by the society.

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