



Portrayal of Womanhood in Arundhati Roy's the Ministry of Utmost Happiness and Louise Erdrich's the Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the multidimensional representation of womanhood in Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness and Louise Erdrich's The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse. By investigating the lived experiences, identities and spiritual journeys of the central female and gender-divers characters. The main objective of the paper is to highlight how both the authors exceed traditional gender narratives to build a nuanced, intersectional and often revolutionary vision of womanhood. Drawing from feminist and postcolonial frameworks, the paper unloads how trauma, resilience, faith and social exclusion shape these portrayals.

Keywords: womanhood, gender, feminist, ojbwwe

Introduction

Literature is a reflection of contemporary society and progression of feminism that can be effectively stressed by studying literature belonging from different eras. The present study tries to analyse the representation of women in the select novels of Arundhati Roy and Louise Erdrich. Many female characters in the literary worlds of fiction and non-fiction have been depicted in different fields and varied roles. Roy's Indian heritage and Erdrich Native American culture has helped them in crafting certain types of female characters in their novels that

still carry within themselves some features of their culture[1].

Roy and Erdrich present numerous different female characters in their novels all in different ways trapped in a system of oppression but also with a substantial degree of agency. Roy and Erdrich have contributed to make the depiction of women more diverse, through giving us various portraits of women that, despite their oppressed and marginalized status [2].

Arundhati Roy's literary works are deeply rooted in the socio-political discourse of contemporary



India. Apart from political and intellectual activism, her novels like *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* deal with the lives of marginalized characters, particularly women. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* also depicts subaltern women's victimization and struggle, incorporating events from the partition of India to almost the early 21st century. Most marginal female characters in the novel have resisted injustice by questioning and breaching social, political and cultural norms and values to construct a world of happiness for all people in a broader social context.

Arundhati Roy's Feminine Vision

Arundhati Roy's novels have been celebrated for their profound exploration of feminist themes and their impact on contemporary literature. Through a comprehensive examination of her novel "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*," This paper critically examines how Roy intricately constructs narratives that challenge patriarchal frameworks and foreground the voices of marginalized women. Her female characters navigate societal norms, assert their agency and strive for autonomy amidst oppressive structures [3]. The article also explores the intersectionality of gender with other social identities such as caste, class and religion, highlighting the complexity of women's experiences. By engaging with Roy's subversive narrative style and her portrayal of diverse and resilient female protagonists, this research shows the transformative impact of her feminist literature [4]. This analysis not only celebrates Roy's contribution to feminist literature but also illuminates the enduring relevance of her works in advocating for gender equality and empowerment in contemporary society.

Roy foregrounds the struggles of women and gender minorities in the backdrop of India's socio-political crises in "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*", Central to this narrative is Anjum, a transgender Hijra, whose very existence challenges binary notions of gender and womanhood. Her identity as a transwoman and her journey from the marginalized world of the Khwabgah to the self-fashioned sanctuary of the graveyard is symbolic of

reclaiming agency in a society that dehumanizes difference.

Through characters like Tilo, Revathy, and Anjum, Roy explores the intersection of gender with caste, religion, sexuality, and nationalism [5]. Roy critiques institutional and state violence, especially the gendered violence inflicted upon Dalit and Muslim women. The women in her narrative often function outside the bounds of heteronormative, patriarchal structures, forming alternative communities of care and resistance.

Louise Erdrich's Feminine Vision

Louise Erdrich explores themes of identity, gender fluidity and spiritual calling through Agnes DeWitt, in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. Agnes DeWitt, is a woman who lives most of her life disguised as Father Damien Modeste, a Catholic priest serving a remote Ojibwe reservation. Her gender transformation is not only a disguise but a thoughtful spiritual and existential journey. She exemplifies both masculine and feminine principles, challenging rigid gender binaries. She has preserved her womanhood within her, though she performs the role of a male priest.

Erdrich's portrayal of Aboriginal women also highlights community, tradition and survival. Women characters such as Pauline Puyat and Mary Kashpaw resist colonial deletion and maintain cultural continuity [6]. These women, through their roles as healers, mothers and storytellers, sustain their people amidst spiritual and cultural disturbances.

Feminine Identity and Spiritual Expression

Both Roy and Erdrich intertwine spirituality into their construction of womanhood. For Roy, spirituality is often syncretic, rooted in sacraments of grief and healing practiced by the Hijra community and other marginalized groups. For Erdrich, spirituality is expressed through syncretism as well, Catholicism entwines with Ojibwe cosmology.

The theme of Resistance and Agency

Women in both novels are not passive, despite being victims of systemic oppression. The characters show



resilience both in quiet and loud ways. Anjum's formation of a sanctuary is an essential act of regaining space and dignity. Tilo's rejection to conform, Revathy's motherhood outside marriage and the development of Zainab by Anjum reflect systems of resistance against patriarchy and state violence.

In the same way, Agnes's choice to take on a male identity to serve her spiritual calling, and her life-long dedication to the Ojibwe people, replicate an internal strength and transformative agency. Indigenous women in Erdrich's work fight cultural integration and reaffirm their traditions through language, rituals and stories [7].

Intersectionality and Postcolonial Feminism

Both the authors Roy and Erdrich have employed intersectional perspectives in their portrayal of womanhood such as gender, race, caste, class, sexuality and religion and how these individualities combine to create unique experiences of domination and resilience for women [8]. This intersectional approach helps the authors present more realistic, subtle and inclusive portrayals of womanhood.

Conclusion

The portrayal of womanhood in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* discloses that individuality is not fixed but fluid and resilient. Roy and Erdrich, through their revolutionary characters and powerful storytelling, have redefined the feminine as a dynamic force for survival, resistance and transformation. Their narratives invite readers to reimagine womanhood beyond binaries, rooted in compassion, spirituality and revolutionary love.

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