

From Silence to Strength: The Empowerment of Women in Adichie And Roy's Texts

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ABSTRACT

The present paper touches upon the changing image of women empowerment in postcolonial and recent English fiction. Through the analysis of some works the research explores the most important confrontations between women characters and male dominance found in the works by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *Purple Hibiscus* and Arundhati Roy *The God of Small Things*. The study is analytical, comparative and qualitative, using feminist and postcolonial theories of literature. It is found that although the prevailing tradition in postcolonial fiction is to bring into the focus the struggle of women against colonial/ local patriarchic systems, contemporary fiction emphasizes to a greater degree the cross-counter and the subjective. The study establishes that, English fiction has turned out to be the highly efficient form of expression and promotion of the idea of women empowerment that mirrors the rest of the social-political transformations and problems.

Keywords: women empowerment, postcolonial fiction, contemporary fiction, feminism, agency, intersectionality, etc.

Introduction:

The representation of women in literature has undergone significant transformation, particularly in the wake of postcolonialism and the rise of contemporary feminist thought. English fiction, as both a product and a critique of its time, offers a rich ground for analysing the shifting curves of women's empowerment. The study investigates how postcolonial and contemporary English novels manifest women's empowerment, focusing on the ways female characters emphasize action, resist oppression, and redefine their identities. Through close readings of *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, the study tries to illuminate the literary strategies that foreground women's voices and experiences.

Research Methodology:

The research study adopts a qualitative, comparative literary analysis. The primary texts — *Purple Hibiscus* and *The God of Small Things* — are selected for their critical analysis with themes of gender, power, and resistance in postcolonial and contemporary contexts. The analysis is informed by feminist literary criticism and postcolonial theory, drawing on the works of scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Secondary sources include journal articles, critical essays, and book chapters that discuss women's empowerment in literature. All sources are cited according to MLA 9th edition guidelines.

Literature Review:

The discourse on women's empowerment in postcolonial fiction often centers on the intersection of gender, race, and colonial history. Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" interrogates the silencing of women's voices in colonial and postcolonial narratives (Spivak 104). Mohanty critiques the homogenization of Third World women in Western feminist discourse, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of agency (Mohanty 72). In contemporary fiction, scholars such as Elleke Boehmer and Priyamvada Gopal highlight the emergence of intersectionality and the reconfiguration of female subjectivity (Boehmer 45; Gopal 89). Both *Purple Hibiscus* and *The God of Small Things* have been widely discussed for their portrayal of women's resistance to patriarchal and social restrictions. (Nnaemeka 260; Roy 31).

Analysis of Selected Texts:

1. *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili Achike's life is dominated by her father's authoritarian rule, which reflects broader social constraints. Adichie uses her internal struggles to illustrate the complexities of female empowerment. For instance, she reflects on her father's oppressive nature, stating, "I had never seen my father so angry. I had never seen him so afraid" (Adichie 56). It is this dichotomy between fear and anger which sums up the emotional upheavals that women go through even in the patriarchal societies which makes it necessary to be empowered and assertive.

Her mother, Beatrice, embodies the silent suffering of women under patriarchal oppression. Her ultimate act of defiance against her abusive husband, poisoning, is a point when the story reaches a climax. Adichie writes, "It was as if my mother had been waiting for the right moment to strike" (Adichie 290). This form of rebellion is also a claim of agency since it is through it that women can rebel and bring trouble to oppressive systems.

Besides, her connection with her Ifeoma is important as a source of empowerment. Aunt Ifeoma embodies a more liberal and nurturing approach to life, contrasting sharply with her father's authoritarianism. Through her encouragement, she begins to find her voice, as seen when she states, "I wanted to be like Aunt Ifeoma, to be free" (Adichie 141). This desire for freedom encapsulates the essence of women's empowerment in the novel, as she learns to assert her identity and desires.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the protagonist Kambili Achike lives under the oppressive rule of her father, Eugene, whose strict adherence to religious and societal norms stifles her and her family's freedom. The novel opens with her reflections on her father's authoritarianism, which is emblematic of both familial and societal oppression. Adichie writes:

Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunt Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom. (Adichie 14)

This metaphor not only highlights the infrequency of freedom in Kambili's life but also foreshadows her journey toward empowerment.

His mother, Beatrice, represents the silent suffering of women in patriarchal societies. Her eventual act of resistance — poisoning her abusive husband—serves as a pivotal moment in the narrative. Adichie illustrates this transformation when he observes, "It was as if my mother had been waiting for the right moment to strike." (Adichie 290). This act of defiance signifies a reclaiming of agency, illustrating how women can resist and challenge oppressive structures.

Furthermore, the relationship between Kambili and her Aunt Ifeoma serves as a decisive source of empowerment. Aunt Ifeoma embodies a more liberal and nurturing approach to life, contrasting sharply with her father's dictatorship. Through her encouragement, she begins to find her voice, as seen when she states, "I wanted to be like Aunt Ifeoma, to be free" (Adichie 141). This desire for freedom summarizes the essence of women's empowerment in the text, as she learns to assert her identity and desires.

2. *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy:

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy explores the lives of Ammu and her children, Rahel and Estha, against the background of social norms and caste discrimination in Kerala, India. Ammu's character is a touching representation of a woman who defies social expectations. She is described as "an unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber" (Roy 166). This contrast highlights her struggle between her maternal predispositions and her desire for personal freedom, illustrating the difficulties of women's empowerment.

Further, Ammu's relationship with Velutha, a man from a lower caste, serves as a fundamental act of rebelliousness against the rigid social structures that order love and relationships. Their love is portrayed as both beautiful and tragic, ending in a shocking consequence. Roy writes, "They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future" (Roy 324). This acknowledgment of their social restraints underscores the harsh realities women face in asserting their desires within oppressive systems.

Moreover, the narrative structure of the text intertwines past and present, reflecting the lasting impact of trauma on women's lives. The twins, Rahel and Estha, grapple with the memories of their mother's struggles and the social forces that shaped their identities. Roy emotionally captures this when she states, "It was like a room in a hospital after the nurse had just been" (Roy 93). This imagery evokes the emotional marks left by social oppression, emphasizing the need for healing and empowerment.

Here, Arundhati Roy tries to find answers concerning the lives of Ammu and her children, Rahel and Estha, under the beliefs of society and the discrimination of castes in Kerala, India. Her character is a poignant representation of a woman who defies societal expectations. She is described as "an unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber" (Roy 166). This duality highlights her struggle between her maternal instincts and her desire for personal freedom, illustrating the complexities of women's empowerment.

Ammu's relationship with Velutha, a man from a lower caste, serves as a radical act of defiance against the rigid social structures that dictate love and relationships. Their love story is not only described as beautiful but also tragic and judged by a terrible outcome. Roy writes, "They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They

were nothing. No future” (Roy 324). Such an understanding of their limitation in the world underlines the grim truth of what women have to go through in an attempt to make their preferences heard in an oppressive system. Furthermore, the narrative structure of the text intertwines past and present, reflecting the lasting impact of trauma on women's lives. The twins, Rahel and Estha, grapple with the memories of their mother's struggles and the societal forces that shaped their identities. Roy poignantly captures this when she states, “They didn’t know then that soon they would go in. That they would cross the river and be where they weren’t supposed to be, with a man they weren’t supposed to love.” (Roy 59)

This foreshadowing highlights on the societal restrictions that rule their lives and realities of defying this. Besides, the theme of social expectations is also represented by the character of Baby Kochamma, who presents the manifested misogyny and resentment, which may emerge in a life directed by social demands. Her positioning the family in a state that gives her control over Ammu and the twins shows the destructive nature of the patriarchal order. Roy writes, “Baby Kochamma’s fear lay rolled up on the car floor like a damp, clammy cheroot” (Roy 72). This description brings the idea of general fear that rules the lives of women in the novel and as such it shows that the demands of society can translate to establishing betrayal and collaborations in the oppression of others.

Thus, the texts, *Purple Hibiscus* as well as *The God of Small Things* is an attempt to shed light on the ways the women empowerment is manifested in the works of post-colonial and modern English writing. Both Adichie and Roy cast light on the plights of their characters who become women within the restrictive patriarchal systems only to fight their way up and to define themselves through their actions. Through their narratives, these authors highlight the complexities of women's empowerment, illustrating that while progress has been made, significant challenges remain. Literature serves as a powerful medium for articulating these experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of the ongoing quest for women's rights and empowerment in diverse cultural contexts.

Conclusion

To sum up the discussion, both the texts, *Purple Hibiscus* and *The God of Small Things* offer profound insights into the manifestation of women empowerment in postcolonial and contemporary English fiction. Adichie and Roy illuminate the struggles of their female protagonists as they navigate oppressive patriarchal structures, ultimately asserting their agency and redefining their identities. Through their narratives, these authors highlight the complexities of women's empowerment, illustrating that while progress has been made, significant challenges remain. Literature serves as a powerful medium for articulating these experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of the ongoing quest for women's rights and empowerment in diverse cultural contexts.

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