



WAGES OF SILENCE- GENDERED ECONOMIC INJUSTICE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN WOMEN FICTION

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Abstract

This research examines the gendered economic injustice in contemporary Indian literature by women authors. Focusing on the prevalent gender gap this study aims to examine and explore how fiction has served as a mirror towards the unjust faced by women, by this passive and patriarchal society. With the help of feminist theoretical framework, the paper conducts a close reading of selected texts to discover and understand the marginalisation of gender in class and societal expectations in twenty first century India. The research argues the importance of literature to deliver the grim reality of this biased world of gender inequality, but also serves as an "antithesis" to reimagine justice through narrative power. This research examines how Contemporary Indian Women writers present the issue of gender pay gap and economic injustice through literary narratives.

Keywords: Gender Pay Gap, Feminist Literature, Indian Women Writers, Economic Injustice, Patriarchy, Contemporary Fiction.

Introduction

Gender gap economic disparity is one of the oldest and the most obstinate issue in India, where social conditions, labour invisibility, and patriarchal control continues to suppress women's access to equitable wages. In recent years, the discourse around gender inequality in India has taken on new urgency, especially concerning economic disparity and wage discrimination. Despite advancements in education, policy reforms, and an increase in women's participation in the workforce, the gender pay gap remains a stark and persistent

reality in India. Indian women through literature questions this malpractice which has been followed through ages, and also proves to be a medium of critique and empowerment to this issue of gender pay gap and economic injustice through literary narratives. While activism, policy, and media debates have addressed these concerns, literature—particularly fiction written by contemporary Indian women—offers a unique and underexplored space for unpacking the emotional, psychological, and structural dimensions of gendered economic injustice. Through subtle storytelling and character-driven narratives, authors such as Meena Kandasamy, Avni Doshi, and Nisha Susan depict realities of economic inequality as experienced by women across various social contexts. This paper investigates how Indian fictional works address the biasness of women's labour and interrogate the socio-economic structures sustaining gendered income inequality. The study contributes to contemporary feminist literary criticism but also bridges a critical gap between imaginative literature and material feminist economics. The paper urges the importance of literature in discourse of economic and gender equality in twenty first century India.

Research Methodology

Using a qualitative approach, this study employs close reading and analysis of related texts. The works selected for this research paper present economic injustice faced by women. The study employs close reading as its principal method, allowing for a detailed textual examination of narrative structure, characterization, symbolism, and thematic development within selected works. These readings are interpreted through a feminist critical lens, specifically drawing from Marxist, liberal, and intersectional feminist theories, which help uncover how literature reflects and critiques gendered labour dynamics. This study focuses on selected works that were published to ensure contemporary focus post-2017. Focused on selected works of women writers that supports a feminist theoretical framework.

Research Objective

The primary objective of this research is to examine the gender pay gap and economic injustice by contemporary Indian women writers in their literary narratives. This study aims to analyse the economic marginalisation faced by women in professional as well as in domestic environment, by the portrayal of various characters and narrative

techniques to articulate economic as well as gender disparities. Furthermore, the research aims to investigate, that how empowerment is generated by such feminist literary narratives. Additionally, the study focuses on the emotional and psychological dimensions of labour as portrayed in fiction, revealing how literature conveys the often-silenced affective burdens of economic injustice. It focuses on feminist theoretical framework such as Marxism, liberalism, and intersectional feminism for deeper analysis of such works and the mindset of the authors. The study further aims to connect fictional depictions to real-world feminist movements, thereby positioning literature as a participant in broader discourses on wage equity, labour rights, and gender justice. By contextualising fictional disparities within ongoing feminist movement in India, the study endeavours to bridge the gap between imaginative literature and material feminist economics. Ultimately the objective is to contribute to contemporary feminist literary criticism, by illuminating the role of fiction for gendered economic justice and challenging the invisibility of women labour in twenty first century.

Case Studies

Meena Kandasmay, 'When I Hit You' 2017

The novel depicts the work of an unnamed protagonist a young writer, who is trapped in a loveless marriage. Her husband suppresses her intellectual and creative capabilities and also denies her any financial freedom. He controls her access of money as well as communication, to gain total control over her. The story analyses how emotional manipulation and financial boundaries are set by the patriarchal environment to silence women. Kandasmay's narrative powerfully exposes how domestic abuse contains psychological, physical as well as economic abuse in accordance with women's labour.

Avni Doshi, 'Burnt Sugar' 2020

This novel tells the story of Antara, whose mother suffers from Alzheimer and is slowly succumbing to memory loss. The novel explores the role of Antara as an unpaid worker, who has been previously neglected by her mother. This story reflects upon the broader issue of women being expected to provide emotional and physical labour, without any recognition and compensation. Her personal sacrifice and interrupted career, presents the patriarchal as well as social expectations of women, placing their family first and

their own desires and expectations to be always secondary, often at the expense of their own economic independence.

Nisha Susan, *'The women who forget to invent Facebook'* 2020

Nisha Susan offers a collection of stories portraying modern Indian women, caught in the crossfire of ambition and structural sexism. One notable story, *'The eight day of the week'* follows a female tech worker whose brilliance is constantly overshadowed by her male colleagues. Despite working longer hours and offering more innovative ideas, she is passed over for promotions and remains underpaid. The story subtly critiques how so-called progressive workplaces perpetuate patriarchal norms under the guise of meritocracy, thus highlighting the silent persistence of the gender pay gap in India's urban professional spaces.

Conclusion

The gender pay gap in India is not only statistical disparity but a lived reality. Through the voices and experiences of their female protagonist, Meena Kamdamay, Avni Doshi, and Nisha Susan uncovers and study the financial marginalisation of women not only domestically, but also in workplaces that claims to be neutral and progressive. These literary texts portrays the individual struggle faced by women and also exposes the truth of wage inequality and the patriarchal culture and norms that normalises women's unpaid and underpaid labour both domestically and professionally. This paper has shown that literature offers more than just narrative entertainment; it is an ethical and political space where the silences around women's labour, both emotional and economic, are broken. These texts bring to the fore the invisible economies that govern women's lives: the unpaid caregiving, the underappreciated creative labour, and the emotional investments that go unrecognized in a patriarchal capitalist framework. The characters in these stories are not merely victims of structural inequality; they are also agents who resist, question, or subvert the norms that bind them. Their narratives contribute to a growing literary archive that challenges the commodification of women's work and the normalization of their economic marginalization. The gender pay gap in India is far more than an economic imbalance, it is a reflection of deeper and systematic inequalities embedded within the cultural, domestic and professional fabric of society. The stories presented by the writers are not merely fictional, but reflects case studies that mirror daily marginalisation of

Indian women. Contemporary Indian women's fiction emerges as a powerful tool in the ongoing struggle for gendered economic injustice.

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