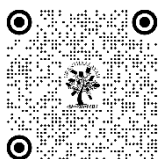


# MEDIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY'S RESISTANCE AND EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY OF *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

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## ABSTRACT

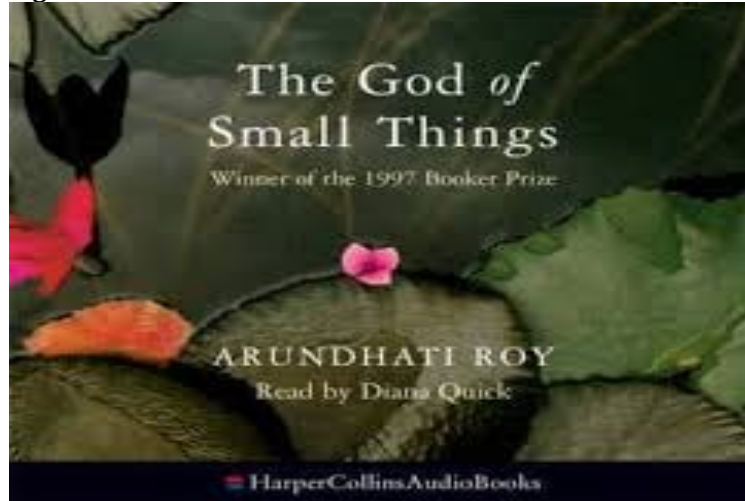
This paper explores the subjects of resistance and empowerment in Arundhati Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things*. The study examines how characters in the book challenge oppressive systems, defy societal norms, and navigate power structures. It analyzes instances where characters find strength and agency, breaking free from the constraints imposed by society. It also emphasizes the interconnectedness of the book and the role of media. It illustrates how media contributes to characters' empowerment and how empowerment fuels further resistance. The study highlights the complex relationship between these themes, demonstrating their individual and collective dimensions. Overall, the paper provides a comprehensive overview of the study's focus on resistance and empowerment in the selected novel shedding light on characters' efforts to navigate and transcend societal boundaries while seeking personal agency and empowerment.

**Keywords:** Role of Media, Relationship, Societal-Boundaries, Power, Resistance, Empowerment

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the present scenario, digital media has a significant reach and impact on a large audience [Madra-Sawicka et al. \(2020\)](#). It has brought a revolution in connecting people. The novel can be promoted to the audience through various digital channels in a short time. In the novel resistance and empowerment are intricately woven themes that drive the narrative and character development. The novel critically analyses these concepts by showcasing the characters' defiance of oppressive systems and societal norms. The acts of resistance undertaken by characters like Velutha and Ammu challenge the rigid social hierarchies, exposing their flaws and hypocrisy. Through their defiance, the characters reclaim their agency, asserting their right to happiness and liberation. [Roy \(1997\)](#)

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1** The Novel Picture

Roy portrays resistance as a transformative force that not only empowers individuals but also inspires others to question and challenge oppressive structures. However, the novel also highlights the complexities and risks involved in resistance, as characters face repercussions for their defiance. This illustrates their potential for personal growth and social change while acknowledging the challenges and consequences that accompany such acts of defiance. As we all know media doesn't operate in a vacuum. It operates in the form and colouration social and political structure it exists. It follows the norms which are controlled and operated by the government, authority, public and leader. For example, in an authoritarian way, the government has direct control of the media. In contrast, the Libertarian approach provides a free marketplace for ideas irrespective of any authority. Additionally, social responsibility theory indicates that media should not be taken as an enterprise in the business sector. Due to its unique nature and responsibility, it should play a vital role in eradicating social evils, highlighting wrongdoings in society, educating the masses and criticizing the wrong policies. The novel presents society's suppression through various characters.

## **2. CHALLENGING SOCIAL HIERARCHIES**

It's a common practice that the government or ruler uses the press as a tool to increase its authority where the individuals have limited choices. However, individuals are more capable of distinguishing between good and bad ideas because they are logical beings who use reason to determine what is good and what is evil. The novel also confirms the individualism. The novel presents a compelling exploration of characters who challenge and resist the oppressive social hierarchies, particularly the rigid caste system prevalent in India. Through their actions, Roy highlights the strength and courage of individuals who dare to defy societal norms and expectations. The resistance against social hierarchies is portrayed through the character of Velutha, as an Untouchable, he occupies the lowest rung of the caste system, subjected to discrimination and marginalization. However, Velutha's forbidden love affair with Ammu, a woman from a higher caste, becomes a powerful act of resistance. Their relationship transcends the societal boundaries imposed by caste, challenging the established order and exposing the hypocrisy of a system that seeks to maintain rigid divisions. Her defiance of caste-based oppression is

significant not only in his liberation but also in the broader context of societal change. His audacious act challenges the dominant narrative of caste-based discrimination, inspiring others to question and challenge the oppressive norms that perpetuate social hierarchies [Kapoor \(2015\)](#), p. 5.

**Figure 2**



**Figure 2** Role of the Novel in Discussing Society's Shortcomings

Ammu is another character who resists the oppressive structures of the caste system. Ammu, as a divorced woman, is considered a social outcast, restricted by the expectations imposed on her as a woman. However, she defies these expectations by seeking independence and pursuing a romantic relationship outside the boundaries of marriage. Through her actions, Ammu demonstrates agency and empowerment, refusing to conform to societal norms that seek to confine and marginalize her. Roy's portrayal of characters challenging social hierarchies emphasizes the potential for personal agency and the subversion of oppressive structures [Mukherjee \(2019\)](#). It highlights the transformative power of individuals who dare to resist and disrupt the established social order, exposing the inherent flaws and injustices within it.

### 3. QUESTIONING GENDER NORMS

Roy presents characters who defy societal expectations and norms surrounding gender, challenging the confines of traditional roles and patriarchal structures. Through their actions, the author explores the complexities of gender identity and the transformative power of resisting gender norms. Ammu stands against the societal expectations placed upon her as a mother and a wife, her decision to divorce her abusive husband represents an act of defiance against the patriarchal institution of marriage. Ammu's determination to reclaim her agency and seek independence disrupts the traditional gender roles imposed on women, highlighting the strength and courage required to challenge societal norms [Chaudhuri \(2016\)](#), p. 11. Additionally, the character of Estha provides another lens through which gender norms are questioned. Estha's sensitivity, vulnerability, and refusal to conform to conventional masculinity challenge the traditional notions of gender roles. Roy portrays Estha's deviation from the societal expectations of masculinity as an act of resistance and an assertion of personal identity. By challenging gender norms, Estha represents a departure from the constraints of rigid gender roles, emphasizing the potential for personal growth and empowerment that lies outside societal

expectations. Roy underscores the transformative power of questioning and challenging patriarchal structures. By challenging traditional gender roles, the novel invites readers to contemplate the limitations imposed by societal expectations and encourages a reimagining of alternative possibilities for self-expression and empowerment.

#### 4. CONFRONTING POLITICAL OPPRESSION

The media should be free from political oppression. Independent media educates people and helps them make better judgments in dire circumstances. In contrast to the approach, the novel discovers the theme of confronting political oppression within the backdrop of political turmoil in India, including the period of the Emergency in the 1970s. The characters in the novel inadvertently find themselves entangled in the web of political oppression, prompting acts of resistance and dissent. Velutha, a member of the Communist Party engages in political activities, aligning himself with the resistance against the repressive regime. His involvement represents a direct challenge to the oppressive political power structures and exemplifies the courage required to stand up against a dominant regime. In contrast, Estha and Rahel, Ammu's twins, unintentionally become participants in political dissent through their encounter with Sophie Mol, an English girl visiting India. Sophie's tragic death and the subsequent blame placed on Velutha highlight the impact of political oppression on innocent individuals.

Figure 3



Figure 3 The Role of the Novel in Displaying India's Unity in Diversity

Their experiences shed light on the far-reaching consequences of political turmoil and the oppressive mechanisms employed by those in power. The depiction of characters confronting political oppression emphasizes the inherent risks and complexities involved in resisting oppressive regimes. It highlights the unpredictable ways in which political oppression can infiltrate personal lives and shape individual destinies. Through the characters' experiences, Roy demonstrates the need for resilience, courage, and a willingness to challenge the status quo in the face of political oppression Roy (2019).

## 5. RECLAIMING PERSONAL AGENCY

The subject of reclaiming personal agency takes centre stage as characters strive to assert their individuality, defy societal expectations, and pursue paths of liberation and self-determination. One character who exemplifies the journey of reclaiming personal agency is Ammu. As a divorced woman in a conservative society, she faces numerous obstacles and societal pressures. However, she refuses to succumb to the limitations imposed upon her. Her decision to divorce her abusive husband is a pivotal act of defiance, signifying her refusal to conform to the prescribed roles of wife and mother. Through this action, she reclaims her agency and asserts her right to autonomy and happiness. Another instance of reclaiming personal agency is portrayed through Rahel, Ammu's daughter. As a young woman growing up in a restrictive environment, Rahel embarks on a journey of self-discovery and liberation. She rejects societal expectations and embraces her desires and aspirations, ultimately reclaiming her agency and asserting her individuality. Rahel's journey serves as a powerful testament to the transformative potential of breaking free from societal constraints [Chaudhary \(2018\)](#). Media in various forms through several platforms played a significant role in many social movements [Lee & Abidin \(2023\)](#). People connect personally and publically through these platforms and discuss various political oppression, resistance, empowerment, etc. The platforms are very useful in distributing material related to the themes.

These characters' acts of reclaiming personal agency not only shape their narratives but also challenge the deeply ingrained power structures and social norms. Through their defiance, they inspire others and instigate a broader questioning of oppressive systems, inviting readers to reflect on their capacity for self-determination and liberation. The author's portrayal of characters reclaiming personal agency underscores the significance of individual autonomy and the right to shape one's destiny. It illuminates the challenges and obstacles faced when striving for personal agency within societal constraints. Moreover, it celebrates the resilience and courage required to challenge oppressive norms and pursue paths that defy societal expectations. By exploring the journey of reclaiming personal agency, the novel invites readers to reflect on their capacity for self-empowerment and the importance of asserting one's individuality in the face of societal pressures. Through the characters' narratives, the novel presents a powerful reminder that reclaiming personal agency is a transformative act that can shape not only individual lives but also challenge and transform the broader structures of power and oppression [Pillai \(2017\)](#), p. 4.

## 6. BREAKING FREE FROM SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS

The novel narrates the epitome of the author's cultural consciousness. It discusses various social constraints existing in Indian society. Breaking free from social constraints emerges as characters challenge the restrictive norms and expectations imposed upon them by society. Through acts of defiance and the pursuit of personal liberation, these characters assert their individuality and strive to transcend the confinements of societal expectations. Velutha engages in a forbidden love affair with Ammu, a woman from a higher caste. By defying the rigid boundaries dictated by the caste system, Velutha challenges the established social hierarchy and exposes the hypocrisy of a system that perpetuates discrimination and marginalization. His audacious act of love represents a powerful assertion of personal agency and liberation from the confines of social norms. Another example

is Estha who refuses to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations. His sensitivity, vulnerability, and rejection of conventional masculinity challenge societal norms, highlighting the potential for personal growth and empowerment that lies outside the boundaries of prescribed gender roles.

**Figure 4**



**Figure 4** The Novel Displays the Discrimination of the Society

Over these characters' acts of defiance and self-assertion, Roy emphasizes the significance of individual autonomy and the right to shape one's own identity. By breaking free from social constraints, the characters not only forge their paths but also disrupt the power structures and norms that perpetuate oppression and marginalization. Roy's consideration of characters breaking free from social constraints prompts readers to question and challenge societal expectations that limit personal expression and growth [Das \(2016\)](#). It serves as a reminder that individuality and self-determination are essential aspects of human existence and that the pursuit of personal liberation can lead to transformative change at both the individual and societal levels.

## **7. RESISTANCE AS EMPOWERMENT**

The theme of resistance as empowerment emerges as characters navigate oppressive systems, challenge societal norms, and assert their agency. Through acts of resistance, these characters not only defy the status quo but also find strength, liberation, and a means to forge their paths. The decision of Ammu to divorce her abusive husband and pursue a forbidden relationship represents a powerful act of resistance against patriarchal norms and societal expectations imposed upon women. Her defiance allows her to reclaim her agency, assert her right to happiness, and break free from the confinements of a stifling marriage. Ammu's resistance becomes a transformative force, empowering her to challenge oppressive structures and chart her destiny. Thereafter, Velutha's resistance against the oppressive caste system highlights the empowering potential of resistance. As an Untouchable engaging in a forbidden love affair, Velutha defies the societal boundaries dictated by caste, challenging the hierarchical structure that perpetuates discrimination. His

act of resistance not only enables personal liberation but also disrupts the dominant narrative of caste-based oppression. Through his defiance, Velutha demonstrates the power of resistance to challenge and dismantle oppressive systems, fostering a sense of empowerment for himself and others.

**Figure 5**



**Figure 5** The Role of the Novel in Highlighting the Evils of the Society

The novel also explores the notion that resistance itself can be empowering, even in subtle ways. Characters like Estha and Rahel unintentionally become involved in acts of resistance through their encounter with Sophie Mol, an English girl visiting India. Their inadvertent participation in political dissent reveals the transformative potential of resistance, as even unintended acts can have far-reaching consequences, shaking the foundations of power and authority [Kapoor \(2015\)](#). The acts of resistance undertaken by the characters not only provide a means of challenging oppressive structures but also enable personal growth, self-assertion, and the pursuit of a more just and equitable society. By resisting oppressive norms, the characters break free from the shackles of societal expectations and open up new possibilities for themselves and others.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The novel followed the agenda-setting theory as at first it identified issues society faces rather than society's views. The issues discussed in it received attention as society has been facing them prominently. The novel presents a rich tapestry of resistance, with characters defying oppressive systems, challenging societal norms, and navigating political turmoil. The various forms of resistance depicted in the novel emphasize the characters' struggle for personal agency and their quest for social change. By exploring these acts of resistance, readers gain a deeper understanding of the characters' motivations, the challenges they face, and the potential consequences of their resistance. In the end, the novel emphasizes how resistance to injustice can have a transforming effect. Characters seek personal agency, liberation, and defiance of social norms, illuminating the transformational power of empowerment. According to the spiral of silence theory, these

advancements are important because these characters hold a minority opinion and could face social isolation, be silenced, face social pressure, etc. by the dominant opinions. It focuses on the protagonists' paths to empowerment, whether they are achieved by taking up resistance, regaining personal agency, or escaping conventional norms. The freedom to express views related to various themes indicates social responsibility theory where people freely express their views about suppression, evils and inequality. The impact of the novel on society is free from the illusory perception of reality as it does not have repetitive messages as appear in television advertisements. The repetitive nature could be persuasive. The novel analysis is free from media bias, persuasiveness, racial stereotyping etc. It helps cultivate the minds of the people. The exposure to the novel characters leads an individual to raise their voice against social evils like inequality, suppression, violence, etc.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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