

Female Resilience and Patriarchal Power in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract

This paper examines the portrayal of female resilience within male-dominated societies in the selected novels of Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy, specifically *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *The God of Small Things* (1997). Despite the differences in time, place, and cultural context, both authors expose the patriarchal structures that restrict women's choices, desires, and socio-economic mobility. The study explores how women negotiate, resist, and sometimes unconsciously internalise male dominance within English and Indian societies. The paper critically analyses, through the lens of feminist literary theory, female characters such as Elizabeth Bennet and Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*, and Ammu, Rahel, and Baby Kochamma in *The God of Small Things*. Austen represents resilience through intellectual independence and critical thinking, as her characters challenge social expectations through questioning, scepticism, analysis, and dialogue in order to resolve conflicts within the social framework. In contrast, Roy portrays resilience as fragile and transgressive, often resulting in punishment when women violate the rigid structures of caste and gender patriarchy. This paper highlights how the female characters of Austen and Roy in both novels struggle to gain identity and agency in a rigid society. Both novels highlight the emergence of female resilience in different timelines and cultures by comparing Austen as a subtle critique of gendered power to Roy as a representative of social and political oppression. This paper tries to gain the attention of the readers while portraying female resilience in a patriarchal society. This paper uses feminist literary criticism to highlight the oppression of female characters in the selected novels of Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy. Both authors tackle the same issue of female resilience under patriarchal power, irrespective of differences in timeline, cultural orientation and geographical setting.

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Introduction

Literature has always been used as a means to reflect the society its pros and cons, social hierarchies and power dynamics within the society. One of the most prominent structures of society is patriarchal power, which provides dominance in social, cultural and economic aspects to males. Thus, it provides the ultimate privilege to men over women who have limitations in authority and independence. Feminist literary criticism is an answer to the systematic oppression of women, which questions how literature plays an important role in shaping gender roles, the strong construction of patriarchal norms and also challenges the oppression of women. This paper uses a feminist theoretical lens to observe the works of Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy. It explores female resilience with the patriarchal system. Although there is a difference in cultural orientation, timeline and geographical setting, both authors expose the gendered oppression of women.

In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Jane Austen depicts a society during the English Regency period, in which women are highly dependent on men for financial security. Due to the inheritance law, the financial security of women depended on men. Women were supposed to endure obedience, modesty and domestic responsibility. They were expected to devote themselves to taking care of household chores, children and family. The female characters of Austen show various responses to the limitations inflicted on them by the patriarchal society. Elizabeth Bennet is one of the strong female characters of Austen, who portrays understanding, moral as well as mental intelligence, striving to obtain independence in a society that is dominated by patriarchal power. On the other hand, Charlotte Lucas represents acceptance. She accepts marriage as the basic means of survival in a patriarchal society. Austen uses irony, satire and a strong narrative style while criticising the emotional and financial dependence of women on men. In *The God of Small Things* (1997), Roy depicts postcolonial India where society is afflicted with patriarchal power as well as the caste system, class system and political problems. Roy's novel is set in Kerala and portrays how class and caste discrimination add to the sufferings of the marginalised community and make the life of women challenging. When Ammu came into a relationship with Velutha, who belongs to a lower caste, receives severe punishment which is a result of the rigid social norms. The character of Rahel shows deep emotional trauma. While Baby Kochamma chose to obey the societal norms due to fear and personal interest. The strong narrative style, choice of emotional language and strong political insight portray the harsh reality of the patriarchal society, which also makes female resilience a painful process, which is often oppressed. Both authors belong to different timelines, cultural orientations, and geographical settings, yet they choose to question the patriarchal system, making the lives and choices of women difficult. Austen uses subtle satire to criticise the patriarchal system, while Roy uses a direct narrative style. Female resilience cannot be achieved through direct confrontation, but it could be achieved through negotiation, understanding, reflecting on the necessity and deliberate refusal to accept the social obligations imposed on women. Through a contrasting understanding of Regency England and postcolonial Indian society, both novels reveal how history and political situation frame female resilience.

This paper uses feminist literary criticism to explore the dynamics of female resilience within a patriarchal society in the selected novels of Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy. It highlights how women achieve identity and agency within a rigid society and how women navigate between resilience and obedience. The study undertakes a crucial examination of narrative style, social and political situation and concludes that resilience is not always achieved through direct refusal of acceptance, but it could be achieved through negotiation and understanding. Through an intercultural perspective, this comparative analysis contributes to feminist literary criticism by highlighting the evolving

representation of women's agency and examining gendered power dynamics within multicultural literary traditions.

Review of Literature

Issac and Ashish Kumar Ghosh (2025) study examines Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, addressing postcolonial, patriarchal oppression and ecocriticism. Ghosh testifies that the theme of the novel is a silent witness to the oppression of females, either through social injustices, patriarchal oppression or due to colonial oppression. This study highlights the interconnectedness between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of the marginalised section of society, revealing Roy's critique of socio-ecological and patriarchal power.

Comparative literature explores Roy's *The God of Small Things* through feminist and postcolonial perspectives. It features how, in a patriarchal Indian society, class, caste and gender play a vital role in female agency and female resistance within the colonial and post-colonial Indian society (Thite Ambadas Kailas and Dr Agnihotri Kavita, 2024). Thite and Dr Agnihotri, through feminist literary criticism, argue that Roy challenges patriarchal dominance and redefines postcolonial female agency.

Mehak Altaf et al., (2025) work provides an interdisciplinary reading of Roy's novel, focusing on Ecofeminism and Eutierra. This paper analyses Roy's portrayal of the relationship between environment, emotions and gender. This paper argues that natural surroundings offer us a reset break, whereas any damage to the ecological surroundings symbolises social and patriarchal oppression.

Singh and Sen (2021) investigate that *Pride and Prejudice* is a pursuit of female identity within the traditional patriarchal society. This paper presents Elizabeth Bennet as a pro-feminist character who challenges gender norms, patriarchal power and conservative marriages. This paper draws attention to critics like Wollstonecraft and de Beauvoir. This study states that Austen, within feminist literary criticism, argues that the portrayal of subverting patriarchal norms, championing female agency, while advocating female dignity and pride.

Shabir Muhammad et al., (2023) argues that *Pride and Prejudice* is a critique of the subversion of passive female stereotypes and advocates intellectual equality. It is a representation of women's agency in rigid social structures. The author uses strong female characters who negotiate education and property, and do not define marriage as the ultimate option for a woman for economic gain. The paper concludes that Austen, through her works, demands equality for females in the male-dominated society but also promotes female agency.

Objective:

- To examine the depiction in Austen's "*Pride and Prejudice*" and "*God of Small Things*", identifying recurring patterns of endurance, resistance and adaptation within gendered power structures.
- To analyse how resilience operates as a transhistorical form of female agency, influenced by the distinct socio-cultural, historical and political contexts of British and postcolonial Indian societies.
- To enrich feminist literary criticism by offering a nuanced understanding of resilience that extends beyond mere psychological persistence to encompass ethical judgement and socio-cultural critique.

Research Methodology:

This paper adopts a qualitative and comparative literature analysis to identify the dynamics of gendered power and resilience in the selected fictions of Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy. Through interdisciplinary approach, feminist literary criticism and postcolonial theory the paper analyses that

how female resilience is portrayed by both the authors with the help of narrative technique, representation of strong female characters and the social orientation. This paper focuses on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) as the literary text for the comparative analysis of gendered power and resilience. Additional literary support is derived from peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books and articles on feminism, postcolonial studies along with research on female resilience. This research uses a comparative literary analysis in the works of Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy to depict female resilience across different ages. It also focuses its attention on different theoretical perspectives, that includes feminist literary criticism, postcolonial theory to reflect the situation in which female resilience is achieved in response to the patriarchal power in the selected novels.

Female Resilience and Patriarchal Power in the Works of Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen critically analyses how gender relations function in early nineteenth-century England. With her creative work and strong character development, Austen critically examines the interplay of gender, class and social norms. In her novel, Austen highlights how women negotiate their independence in a society that is rigid in its approach, forcing women to serve and abide by the social norms through their moral conduct and providing fewer opportunities to women, which is oppressive and unjust. In her novel, Austen's female characters achieve resilience through indirect ways of self-expression, moral conduct and intelligence. Not by being loud in their approach. The female characters of the novel are thoughtful, intelligent and emotional, who strike a balance between love and resiliency to achieve female agency.

Arundhati Roy, on the other hand, is one of the contemporary authors who is very vocal about the social injustices and sufferings of mankind through her works. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* examines the sufferings of individuals affected by caste, class and patriarchal systems. Through her narrative style, Roy exposes a complex society that endures inequality and injustice. Austen, in *The Pride and Prejudice* portrays resilience through the character of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy when their relationship was blooming with understanding and self-growth. Their relation was not a result of submission, but rather it was based on emotions, transformation and compromise. In *The God of Small Things* Roy portrays a society that is rigid in its approach, and anyone who dares to violate the social norms faces severe and violent consequences, such as social rejection, physical or emotional violence, especially against women.

The narrative style used by both the authors are quite different. Austen uses irony, satire and subtle critique of society while questioning the patriarchal system. On the other hand, Roy uses a lyrical and fragmented narrative style to portray the unjust system of the society. Through her work Roy also suggests that many women face social oppression due to fear or to their conditioning to abide by such rules since childhood. Although there is a major difference in timeline, cultural and social orientation of Roy and Austen, but both the authors expose how women struggle for their identity, independence and authority. Through their works, both the authors highlight how women challenge the orthodox system in which women are believed to serve the male but the female characters of both the novels show strength, resilience and determination to break the social injustices imposed on them. Both the novels, features how female resilience challenges patriarchal system. In *Pride and Prejudice*, resilience is achieved through negotiation, moral integrity and understanding. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy achieves resilience through courage and determination.

Jane Austen's Perspective on Female Resilience and Patriarchal Power:

The overall theme of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen is property laws, inheritance law and marriage. When the Bennet daughters were denied the ownership of the Longbourn estate, and Mr Collins was made the legal heir, this made it clear that the male members were generally made the owners rather than the females in early nineteenth-century England. Marriage, which is generally

considered a union of two souls, emotionally and romantically, was not the situation. It was also required to fulfil the basic financial necessities of women. Women were given opportunities not based on their intellectual capabilities but based on their physical beauty, their obedience to the rules and principles of society, as well as their social status. All these practices were criticised by Austen. With the help of irony and strong character, it also exposed the injustices and oppression women faced throughout the ages.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet represents female resilience with her dedication to not surrender to the oppressive society, her moral integrity and her outspoken attitude. During that time, marriage was considered the ultimate plan for a woman to settle in her life, to gain financial and emotional security. But Elizabeth's refusal to marry Mr Collins is a strong indication that she is not settling for less. Elizabeth's strong character is marked by intelligence, courage to challenge and not surrender to the patriarchal power of the society. Austen, with the help of different female characters, tried to represent how women deal with such social issues as different characters have different perceptions of their own. For example, Charlotte Lucas accepted the marriage proposal of Mr Collins. This shows the moral, emotional, and financial dependence a woman has on a man, which also forces a woman to compromise on her wishes and desires. The Bennet family received major criticism from society when Lydia Bennet eloped with Wickham. Austen, in her novel, with the help of different female characters, demonstrates how women in different situations respond to patriarchal power, as some choose resistance while others choose to negotiate.

Arundhati Roy's Perspective on Female Resilience and Patriarchal Power

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy features a society that is rigid and violent in its approach towards patriarchy, caste system and the aftereffects of colonial rule. In this novel, women are always under great scrutiny. They have to face social and political oppression. Their life is led according to the set rules of the society, as any deviation would lead them to face severe consequences and many times physical punishment also. The serving branches of patriarchal power expand to domestic violence, social exclusion and inequalities in all aspects of a woman's life. The character of Ammu faces severe consequences for being rebellious. After the end of her toxic marriage, she received very little support from her parents when she returned and was often treated harshly by her family. Ammu's relationship with Velutha is a serious matter of being rebellious and challenging the social hierarchy. Ammu was an upper-caste Syrian Christian woman, while Velutha was a Dalit carpenter. Their blooming relationship was a slap to the rigid hierarchy system, but it soon met its tragic end. Velutha was beaten to death, and Ammu was thrown out of her home and left to live under strict social limitations and received public criticism. Ammu was also separated from her children, and at the age of thirty-one, she died due to poverty. Roy, in this novel, exposes a society that is extremist in its approach, and any deviation would never be tolerated and would face severe consequences.

Result and Discussion

This paper is a comparative analysis of the works of Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy, which brings into the limelight the struggle of women under a patriarchal society and the consequences it brings with resistance. Austen deals with gender-based discrimination in early nineteenth-century England. Through her characters, she portrays the interplay of gender, class and caste-based discrimination. Through her novels, Austen depicts the struggle of the female characters who are oppressed by the rigid and ruthless expectations of society. In contrast, the novel of Arundhati Roy shows the harsh reality of the situation of women in postcolonial India. Through her female characters, Roy portrays how women are suppressed in society, socially, culturally, religiously or within the political framework. Arundhati Roy's strong narrative technique reveals how women deal with exploitation and marginalization by challenging and gaining control against the predetermined code of conduct for women, which is highly unjust and unequal. The works of Austen suggest that resilience

can be achieved through determination, patience and perseverance. On the other hand, Roy's idea of resistance is a bit different, as it could be achieved with pain accompanied by tragedy, violence, and often being excluded from society.

Future Scope of the Paper:

This paper provides the opportunity for future research in the following aspects:

- Comparative analysis of the works of Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy.
- Analysing themes such as patriarchal power, female resilience, and female agency, discrimination based on class and caste in nineteenth-century England and postcolonial India.
- Focus limited to comparative literature and feminist literary criticism.
- Analysis of female resilience through characters

This paper contributes to feminist literary criticism and comparative literature and creates a scope for future research.

Relevance of the Study

This paper addresses issues such as female resilience, patriarchal power and female agency, which have been the major concerns of nineteenth-century England to postcolonial India, making this paper highly relevant. This paper examines the works of Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy, providing a critical understanding of literature as it works as a critique and shows the reality of social injustices prevalent in society.

The basic idea of this paper is to highlight that female resilience is not limited to survival within a society dominated by men, but it is a transformation of women who are aware of their identity, individuality, self-growth, and who are independent emotionally and financially. This paper is a comparison of both authors in different time frames and cultural orientations of the transformation of women who are powerful enough to challenge the patriarchal system to gain their authority. This study offers a more inclusive approach for understanding female resilience under patriarchal power by bringing together Western culture and postcolonial Indian society. It also provides a broader platform for future research in feminist literary criticism.

Need for the Paper

Gaining female agency under patriarchal power is one of the most alarming questions that is undertaken and tried to seek out within different time frames, either politically, socially or emotionally. Females of society still face challenges, and when they try to overcome them, they are often labelled as rebellious or outcasts. Such examples are always there in society, which is one of the reasons for female resilience. This paper compares the works of Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy, which provides us with an opportunity to understand how patriarchal power oppresses and restricts female agency. This paper presents the importance of literature through which we can examine gender-based discrimination, the patriarchal system, and female resistance.

Suggestions for Future Research

This paper suggests that future research could be conducted by adding other works of Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy's novels for a deeper understanding of female resilience under patriarchal power. Scholars can also add postcolonial feminism and ecofeminism for a better understanding of female resilience. Future research may also add different authors from different timelines and cultural orientations for a wider perspective. Such research can be an interesting and attractive exploration of female resilience under gendered power and structure.

Summing Up

To sum up, we conclude that this paper deals with Jane Austen and Arundhati Roy's novels, which show the interplay of patriarchal power and gendered resilience. Both authors belong to different timelines and cultural orientations, but they deal with the same problem of female resilience under patriarchal power. This paper highlights the transformation of women from the early nineteenth century who follow the ethical principles to a postcolonial woman who is outspoken for her rights, wishes and desires.

Although there is a major difference in timeline and cultural setting, both authors, with the help of different strategies, show how women gain their identity, independence and challenge the authority of a male-dominated society. This comparative study highlights the concept of female resilience not only as a path to survive within the patriarchal society but also to gain their authority. In Austen's novel, resilience is achieved through patience, emotional as well as intellectual strength. While in Roy's novel, resilience is achieved by breaking the set principles of the society for a woman under patriarchal power, or simply by refusing to obey them. The comparison of the novels is a transformation that is not settling for less and is ready to challenge as well as gain her own authority.

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