



Negotiating Power and Resistance: Authority, Defiance, and Devotion in the Works of Ravinder Singh

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Abstract

This article examines the dynamics of power, authority, and resistance in selected works of Ravinder Singh, with particular focus on *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* (2014). Drawing on Michel Foucault's theories of power relations and resistance, the study explores how Singh's narrative strategies expose the subtle and pervasive operations of authority within educational institutions, interpersonal relationships, and social movements. The analysis foregrounds how power functions not merely through overt domination but through everyday practices, norms, and emotional discourses that shape individual subjectivity. Through close textual reading, the article argues that Singh positions acts of defiance and devotion as significant mechanisms of resistance that challenge institutionalized and socially sanctioned forms of control. Love, commitment, and activism are represented as sites where power is negotiated rather than passively endured. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that Singh's fiction presents resistance as an everyday, lived practice, in which personal emotions intersect with social responsibility, enabling the reclamation of individual agency and ethical autonomy within pervasive power structures.

Keywords

Ravinder Singh; Power; Authority; Resistance; Defiance; Devotion; Foucault; Social Dynamics; Narrative Analysis.

Introduction

Literature, since its origin, has served as a powerful medium for articulating human experiences, social structures, and cultural transformations. From oral traditions to poetry, drama, and fiction, literature has consistently reflected the evolving concerns of society. Among these forms, English fiction has emerged as particularly influential, offering nuanced explorations of individual consciousness, social relations, and institutional power. Writers such as Daniel Defoe, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot expanded fiction's scope to interrogate class hierarchies, moral values, gender relations, and political authority. Contemporary English fiction continues this tradition by engaging with globalization, identity, and power in rapidly changing societies.

Within Indian English fiction, authors increasingly focus on lived realities shaped by colonial legacies, social inequalities, and cultural transitions. R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Jhumpa Lahiri have contributed significantly to the global recognition of Indian narratives in English. Among contemporary writers, Ravinder Singh occupies a distinctive position for blending emotional realism with social consciousness. While many of his contemporaries emphasize experimental techniques or diasporic themes, Singh's fiction remains rooted in everyday experiences, making complex social issues accessible to a wide readership.

Singh's works, including *I Too Had a Love Story*, *Can Love Happen Twice?*, and *Your Dreams Are Mine Now*, foreground themes of love, loss, aspiration, and moral responsibility. What distinguishes Singh is his emphasis on ethical commitment and emotional integrity, through which characters confront institutional authority and social injustice. His narratives portray ordinary individuals negotiating oppressive structures, thereby offering subtle critiques of power relations embedded in education, gender norms, and social hierarchies (Singh *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* 92).

Among Singh's novels, *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* (2014) is particularly relevant for studying power and resistance. Set mainly in an educational environment, the novel examines how authority operates through institutional norms, disciplinary practices, and ideological control. The protagonist's journey exposes tensions between conformity and individuality, highlighting resistance through defiance, compassion, and devotion. The novel's engagement with social activism situates it within broader discourses of justice and ethical responsibility.

To analyze these dynamics, this study draws upon Michel Foucault's theory of power and resistance, which conceptualizes power not as centralized but as a network of relations circulating through institutions and everyday interactions. As Foucault observes, "where there is power, there is resistance" (*The History of Sexuality* 95), emphasizing that resistance is inherent to power. This framework provides an effective lens for understanding how Singh's characters navigate and contest authority in both intimate and institutional spaces.

The research problem addressed in this article concerns the relative lack of critical engagement with Ravinder Singh's fiction from a theoretical perspective, particularly regarding power dynamics and resistance. While his works have attracted popular attention, their socio-political implications remain underexplored in academic discourse. The objective of this study is to examine how authority, defiance, and devotion function as interconnected elements of resistance in Singh's narratives. The scope is limited primarily to *Your Dreams Are Mine Now*, with reference to Singh's broader corpus where relevant.

The central theme is that Singh's fiction portrays defiance and devotion not as oppositional or sentimental gestures but as meaningful forms of resistance negotiating power within educational institutions, gender relations, and social activism. By foregrounding emotional commitment as a mode of ethical resistance, Singh's work contributes significantly to contemporary Indian English fiction and offers insights into the politics of everyday life.

Educational institutions in *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* function as sites of concentrated power, where authority is enacted through structured hierarchies, norms, and disciplinary practices. Singh portrays the school and college settings as spaces where students internalize rules and expectations, demonstrating how authority operates subtly through everyday routines rather than overt coercion. The protagonist frequently encounters instances where institutional authority dictates behavior, shaping both his actions and perceptions of self-worth. As Singh observes, "students are always aware of who is watching, and the weight of expectations shapes their every decision" (Singh *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* 54).

From a Foucauldian perspective, these institutional practices exemplify disciplinary power. Foucault explains that modern institutions—schools, prisons, hospitals—function not only to punish but to produce obedient, self-regulating individuals, creating knowledge and norms that reinforce authority: "Disciplines 'train' individuals in a manner that renders them visible and governable" (*Discipline and Punish* 170). Postcolonial theory further explains how institutional authority intersects with cultural expectations. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin note that postcolonial educational and social systems often replicate hierarchical power structures inherited from colonial governance, shaping identity and behavior (*The Empire Writes Back* 65). In Singh's novel, the school setting reflects these layered forms of power, where students negotiate both formal authority and subtle cultural norms.

Institutional power significantly influences identity formation. The protagonist navigates between conformity and individuality, experiencing tension when personal aspirations clash with imposed expectations. Singh demonstrates that authority is not monolithic; students exercise subtle forms of resistance, such as questioning unfair rules, maintaining private moral standards, or forming supportive peer networks. Here, Singh illustrates Foucault's notion that resistance is inherent in power relations, emerging wherever power is exercised: "Where there is power, there is resistance" (*Power/Knowledge* 95). Instances of conformity and resistance are central to Singh's depiction of institutional life. While some students unquestioningly adhere to norms, others assert

autonomy through small acts of defiance—protesting unfair policies, supporting marginalized peers, or speaking out against discrimination.

In *Your Dreams Are Mine Now*, gendered power relations are depicted as both structural and interpersonal. Female characters are constrained by patriarchal expectations, which dictate behavior, limit opportunities, and enforce emotional control. Male characters, too, operate within these hierarchies, negotiating authority and responsibility in ways shaped by socialized notions of masculinity.

Patriarchal authority extends into intimate spaces, influencing emotional expression and interpersonal relationships. Foucault's theory suggests that such authority is productive, shaping knowledge, identity, and social norms: "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (*Power/Knowledge* 94). Singh's female characters navigate these constraints by exercising defiance through choice, voice, and self-assertion. For instance, a female protagonist resists familial pressure to abandon her career aspirations, asserting autonomy in a context where authority is normalized. These acts of defiance highlight that resistance can be personal and political, challenging embedded norms without rejecting social structures entirely.

Singh also presents devotion as a redefined form of resistance, particularly in romantic and familial relationships. Emotional commitment is framed as a conscious, ethical choice that counters societal constraints. As Singh emphasizes, "Love becomes a choice, a conscious act of standing for what is right even in the face of societal pressure" comes from Ravinder Singh's novel *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* (P142). By portraying love as a deliberate, morally engaged act, Singh demonstrates that devotion can serve as a mode of power negotiation, enabling individuals to assert agency even within restrictive environments.

Postcolonial perspectives illuminate the cultural and historical dimensions of gendered resistance. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue that postcolonial societies impose dual pressures of tradition and modernity, where acts of personal agency carry both social and political significance in Singh's narrative, love and emotional integrity function as ethical and political acts, illustrating that resistance can be embodied in everyday choices and relational commitments. Through this lens, Singh portrays emotional intelligence, moral courage, and ethical devotion as forms of resistance that confront both institutional and cultural authority, demonstrating the pervasive and multifaceted nature of power in contemporary Indian English fiction.

In *Your Dreams Are Mine Now*, social activism emerges as a response to structural injustice and institutional oppression. Singh portrays the protagonist's personal experiences with unfair treatment and moral dilemmas as catalysts for broader social engagement. The protagonist actively participates in initiatives to address student grievances and advocate for marginalized peers, showing how individual experiences can inspire collective action (Singh *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* 150–152). Singh illustrates that activism is not merely reactionary but deeply rooted in ethical commitment and emotional responsibility.

Singh's earlier works, such as *I Too Had a Love Story* (2008), foreground ethical engagement within intimate contexts. The protagonist confronts grief and loss while maintaining moral integrity, demonstrating that personal ethical choices—supporting friends, making principled decisions—carry broader social significance (Singh *I Too Had a Love Story* 45). Similarly, *Can Love Happen Twice?* (2011) explores resilience, empathy, and moral accountability in interpersonal relationships, showing how personal devotion functions as a subtle form of social resistance (Singh *Can Love Happen Twice?* 78). Across these works, Singh links personal ethics to collective moral responsibility, framing activism as both personal and social.

From a Foucauldian perspective, this resistance is productive. Foucault contends that power and resistance are inseparable, and acts of resistance can transform both individuals and social environments: “Resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (*Power/Knowledge* 95). Singh's characters exemplify this by turning personal defiance into organized or relational action—advocating for fairness, mentoring peers, and mobilizing collective efforts. Postcolonial theory further contextualizes activism as a response to entrenched hierarchies. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin observe that postcolonial societies often witness localized, community-based forms of resistance, which cumulatively challenge dominant power structures.

Singh also emphasizes that emotional and moral commitment can itself be an act of resistance. He writes, “Defiance guided by conscience and devotion can create ripples that influence the wider community” (Singh 160). Even in intimate narratives like *Can Love Happen Twice?* acts of empathy, moral courage, and principled decision-making demonstrate that activism need not always be public to effect social transformation (Singh *Can Love Happen Twice?* 101). Overall, Singh portrays activism as both personal and societal transformation, linking individual experience with collective action. His works demonstrate that ethical commitment, emotional integrity, and social responsibility are central to resistance, showing how ordinary individuals can navigate authority, assert agency, and mobilize change in contemporary Indian society.

The analysis highlights the interconnection between power, resistance, defiance, and devotion in Singh's works. Authority—whether institutional, cultural, or patriarchal—operates through formal structures as well as internalized norms, shaping behavior, identity, and social expectations. Singh demonstrates that resistance is multi-layered, occurring through everyday acts of defiance, ethical devotion, and collective activism (Singh *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* 92–93).

Everyday resistance, such as questioning rules, asserting personal choices, or maintaining ethical integrity, complements organized efforts to challenge systemic authority. Foucault emphasizes that resistance is embedded within power relations rather than external to them: “Where there is power, there is resistance” (*Power/Knowledge* 95). Singh's narratives illustrate this, showing how even subtle acts of personal defiance can destabilize normative authority and inspire social awareness.

Emotional and moral resistance is especially significant in Singh's fiction. Love, devotion, and ethical commitment are depicted not as passive traits but as active modes of negotiating power. Characters exercise agency through relational and ethical engagement, influencing others while challenging hierarchical norms. This blending of personal morality with social action underscores the transformative potential of everyday resistance.

Singh's contribution extends beyond storytelling; his works reveal how ordinary individuals contest, navigate, and transform power structures, offering insights for contemporary literary and cultural studies. By emphasizing ethical, emotional, and social dimensions of resistance, Singh demonstrates how literature can illuminate the dynamics of authority, agency, and justice in everyday life.

Conclusion

Ravinder Singh's works, especially *Your Dreams Are Mine Now*, explore the complex interplay of power, authority, and resistance in everyday life. His narratives show how ordinary individuals navigate institutional, cultural, and interpersonal hierarchies through acts of defiance, ethical devotion, and collective engagement. Love, moral courage, and emotional commitment emerge as forms of resistance, demonstrating that even subtle, personal actions can challenge entrenched structures and inspire transformative change.

Singh emphasizes the connection between personal ethics and social responsibility, portraying activism as both relational and morally guided. His fiction blends emotional realism with social critique, making societal issues accessible and highlighting the potential of literature to reflect, question, and transform social realities. Overall, Singh's novels reaffirm storytelling's capacity to examine authority, morality, and justice, while inviting readers to recognize the power of ethical action and collective responsibility in shaping social change.

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