


**International Conference – 2025: Developed India @ 2047**

**Charting Multidisciplinary and Multi-Institutional Pathways for Inclusive Growth and Global Leadership held on 4th & 5th April, 2025**

**Organised by: IQAC - Gossner College, Ranchi**

## **Repression and Identity: A Psychoanalytic Comparative Study of ‘The God of Small Things’ and ‘A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man’**

**Ayushi Parashar**

Research Scholar, Department of English, Ranchi University, Ranchi.

Email id: ayushi.singh7.1998@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

This research paper explores repression and identity formation through a psychoanalytic lens in Arundhati Roy’s “The God of Small Things” and James Joyce’s “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man”. Utilizing Freudian and Lacanian frameworks, the study examines how Ammu and Stephen Dedalus experience repression due to familial, social, and cultural pressures, and how these forces shape their quests for self-realization. Through close textual analysis, the paper highlights the universality of repressed desires across different cultural settings and the transformative role of art and rebellion in overcoming societal constraints. The discussion situates these literary journeys within the broader context of India’s aspirations for 2047, emphasizing the importance of multidisciplinary perspectives and institutional reforms for inclusive growth and global leadership. The findings suggest that literature and psychoanalytic theory are vital for understanding and addressing the psychological and structural barriers to empowerment, inclusion, and national progress.

**Keywords:** *Repression, Identity, Psychoanalysis, Freud, Lacan, The God of Small Things, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Art, Self-Realization, Caste, Gender, Catholicism, Nationalism, Agency, Inclusion, Developed India @ 2047.*

### **Introduction**

The intersection of repression and identity is central to both psychoanalytic theory and the project of nation-building. As India charts its path toward 2047, the centenary of independence, the vision of a developed nation is inseparable from the psychological and social liberation of its people. Literature, especially when analyzed through a psychoanalytic lens, provides unique insights into how individuals navigate and resist the forces that constrain them.

Arundhati Roy’s “The God of Small Things” and James Joyce’s “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man” are set in different continents and centuries, yet both novels explore how individuals confront and are shaped by the repressive structures of their societies. This comparative study uses Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic frameworks to analyze the protagonists’ struggles with repression and identity. By doing so, it demonstrates the relevance of multidisciplinary approaches to understanding the barriers to inclusion and empowerment—key themes for India’s future.

**International Conference – 2025: Developed India @ 2047****Charting Multidisciplinary and Multi-Institutional Pathways for Inclusive Growth and Global Leadership held on 4th & 5th April, 2025****Organised by: IQAC - Gossner College, Ranchi****Theoretical Framework****Freud's Theory of Repression**

Freud's theory of repression posits that individuals unconsciously suppress desires, memories, or feelings that are unacceptable to the conscious mind. These repressed elements, however, continue to influence behavior, often resurfacing in disguised forms. As Freud writes, "The repressed merges into the unconscious, and it is from the unconscious that the repressed returns" ("The Interpretation of Dreams", 605).

**Lacan's Mirror Stage and the "Other"**

Lacan expands on Freud, arguing that the ego is formed when a child first recognizes its image in a mirror—a process that is both empowering and alienating. The child's self-image is always mediated by the gaze of the "Other," representing society, family, and culture. Lacan writes, "The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation— and which manufactures for the subject... the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality" (\*Écrits\*, 4).

**Multidisciplinary Relevance**

These psychoanalytic concepts are not only tools for literary analysis but also offer frameworks for understanding how societies include or exclude, empower or repress. This is crucial for India's vision of inclusive growth and global leadership.

**Contextual Background****"The God of Small Things"**

Set in Kerala, India, during the 1960s and 1970s, Roy's novel centers on Ammu, whose love for Velutha, a lower-caste man, leads to tragedy. The narrative critiques the intersection of caste, gender, and family, exposing the barriers to personal freedom and self-expression. As Roy writes, "They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much" (Roy, 31).

**"A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man"**

Joyce's novel traces Stephen Dedalus's journey from childhood to early adulthood in Ireland. Stephen's development is shaped by the repressive influences of Catholicism, nationalism, and family. He seeks to escape these constraints and embrace his artistic calling. Joyce writes, "I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe... and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can" (Joyce, 268).



### International Conference – 2025: Developed India @ 2047

**Charting Multidisciplinary and Multi-Institutional Pathways for Inclusive Growth and Global Leadership held on 4th & 5th April, 2025**

**Organised by: IQAC - Gossner College, Ranchi**

## Repression in “The God of Small Things” and “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man”

### Repression in “The God of Small Things”

Ammu’s life is marked by layers of repression. Her love for Velutha is condemned by the caste system: “It was a little coldness that grew and grew. Like a tree in a forest. Like a forest in a tree” (Roy, 197). The “Love Laws” dictate “who should be loved. And how. And how much” (Roy, 33). Ammu’s longing for autonomy is also repressed by her role as a woman: “She was not the kind of woman who could afford to be seen with a man” (Roy, 44).

Roy’s fragmented narrative mirrors the workings of the unconscious. Memories and traumas resurface in non-linear ways: “It didn’t matter that the story had begun, because it had already ended” (Roy, 32). The repression of Ammu’s desires leads to emotional breakdown and social ostracism: “Ammu died alone. She was thirty-one. Not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age” (Roy, 161).

### Repression in “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man”

Stephen Dedalus’s repression is rooted in religion and nationalism. His sexual desires are met with guilt: “He would be sinning mortally if he yielded to his lust. He would be thrust down into hell for ever” (Joyce, 93). The Church, as the “Other,” imposes a sense of shame: “The soul is stained with sin, and must be cleansed” (Joyce, 107).

Stephen’s rebellion is gradual. He questions the authority of the Church and the nation: “When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight... I shall try to fly by those nets” (Joyce, 220). His artistic awakening is both a rejection and a transformation of repression.

## Identity Formation and the Psychoanalytic Process

### Ammu’s Struggle with Identity

Ammu’s identity is fractured by repression. Her internalization of caste and gender taboos is evident: “Ammu felt, not for the first time, a glancing blow of guilt” (Roy, 214). Her love for Velutha is both an assertion of agency and a source of self-destruction: “She loved by night the man her children loved by day” (Roy, 219). The tragic outcome—Velutha’s death and Ammu’s ostracism—illustrates the destructive power of internalized repression.

### Stephen Dedalus’s Identity Formation

Stephen’s journey is from alienation to self-awareness. The mirror stage is echoed in his self-reflection: “He turned to the flyleaf of the geography and read what he had written there: himself, his name and where he was” (Joyce, 9). His artistic vocation is a reclamation of identity: “Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience... to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race” (Joyce, 276).



## International Conference – 2025: Developed India @ 2047

**Charting Multidisciplinary and Multi-Institutional Pathways for Inclusive Growth and Global Leadership held on 4th & 5th April, 2025**

**Organised by: IQAC - Gossner College, Ranchi**

### Cultural and Societal Pressure in Identity Construction

#### Caste, Gender, and Family in India

Ammu's conflict with the caste system is a critique of social structures: "It was a time when the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened" (Roy, 31). The intersection of caste and gender creates a web of repression: "Ammu had no Locusts Stand I" (Roy, 44)—no place to stand, no social legitimacy.

#### Religion, Nationalism, and Family in Ireland

Stephen's repression is shaped by the intertwining of religion, nationalism, and family: "Ireland is the old so that eats her farrow" (Joyce, 220). His rejection of these forces is a quest for autonomy: "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe" (Joyce, 268).

### The Role of Art in Self-Expression

#### Stephen's Artistic Vocation

Stephen's embrace of art is a conscious rejection of imposed identities: "I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can" (Joyce, 268). His artistic awakening is both a personal and a political act.

#### Ammu's Creative Resistance

Ammu's acts of defiance—her relationship with Velutha—are forms of creative resistance: "She spoke to him of things that had no place in the world she lived in" (Roy, 217). Even in tragedy, her story is one of agency: "She was free, and yet she was not free" (Roy, 161).

### Comparative Discussion: Universal and Particular Aspects

Both novels depict the universal struggle for identity in the face of repression. The particularities — caste and gender in India, religion and nationalism in Ireland—highlight the importance of context-sensitive approaches to inclusion and empowerment. The protagonists' journeys resonate with the broader aspirations of Developed India @ 2047, where dismantling social barriers and nurturing creativity are essential for progress.

### Implications for Developed India @ 2047

#### Multidisciplinary Approaches

This study demonstrates the value of integrating literary analysis, psychoanalytic theory, and cultural studies. The arts and humanities are essential partners in national development, fostering empathy, critical thinking, and innovation.



## International Conference – 2025: Developed India @ 2047

**Charting Multidisciplinary and Multi-Institutional Pathways for Inclusive Growth and Global Leadership held on 4th & 5th April, 2025**

**Organised by: IQAC - Gossner College, Ranchi**

### Multi-institutional Collaboration

The critique of social structures calls for collaboration among government, civil society, educational institutions, and the private sector. Only through coordinated efforts can India dismantle barriers to inclusion and foster a culture of empowerment.

### Inclusion and Empowerment

Ammu and Stephen's stories underscore the importance of inclusion and empowerment. Policies must prioritize the dismantling of social hierarchies, the promotion of agency, and the nurturing of creativity—core goals for India's future.

### Global Leadership

By situating Indian experiences within a global context, the paper highlights the importance of international dialogue and learning. India's journey toward global leadership will be defined by its ability to balance tradition and innovation, inclusion and excellence.

### Conclusion

Through close textual analysis, this paper has demonstrated how repression and identity are central themes in "The God of Small Things" and "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man". Using Freudian and Lacanian frameworks, it has explored how Ammu and Stephen navigate the internal and external forces that shape their identities. Their journeys illuminate the complex relationship between repression, societal expectations, and self-realization, illustrating the ways in which art and self-expression provide a means of breaking free from oppressive forces. These insights are vital for India's aspirations in 2047, as the nation seeks to foster inclusive growth, empower its citizens, and assume a leadership role on the global stage.

### References

1. Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. 4th ed., Basic Books, 2010.
2. Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Dover Publications, 1994.
3. Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: A Selection*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, W.W. Norton & Company, 1977.
4. Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. Random House, 1997.
5. "VIKSIT BHARAT@2047: A PSYCHOLOGIST'S PERSPECTIVE." Publishing.org.in.
6. "Psychological Perspectives of Viksit Bharat 2047." Kristu Jayanti College.
7. "Vision India@2047: Transforming the Nation's Future." Drishti IAS.
8. "PM launches 'Viksit Bharat @2047: Voice of Youth'." PIB.
9. "2025 and Beyond: Shaping a Developed India Mission Viksit Bharat." LinkedIn.
10. "Efforts to Make 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047." NEXT IAS.
11. "Viksit Bharat @2047: A vision for India's sustainable development." Scientific Temper.