Residual and Emergent Cultures in the Fiction of Jagdish Prasad Singh

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Abstract

Through an understanding of Raymond Williams' cultural materialism, this research discusses Jagdish Prasad Singh's fiction, describing the interaction between emergent, dominating, and residual cultural formations in rural northern India. Singh's stories combine literature and sociology to show how local political institutions, labour dynamics, patriarchal norms, and caste hierarchies affect the lives of marginalized populations. It illustrates how rural India continues to adhere to traditional feudal customs despite the presence of modern institutions that promote development, yet often uphold injustice. Using Williams' paradigm, the study finds dominant influences that alter social structures, such as commercial agriculture and electoral politics, as well as lingering cultural components, such as ceremonial authority and caste discipline. Singh's work challenges old structures and exposes new cultural forces, such as female autonomy and educational ambitions. His notion of "structures of feeling" throws light on human identity and social developments in the face of tyranny. Ultimately, Singh's fiction serves as a cultural archive, documenting the growth of values, power structures, and social shifts in rural India.

Keywords: - Cultural Negotiation, Rural Modernity, Narrative Realism, Social Transformation, Traditional Ethics, Community Dynamics, Power Structures, Collective Memory, Value Transition, Literary Sociology.

Introduction

Jagdish Prasad Singh was a contemporary Indian novelist and storyteller whose works focus on the everyday rhythms, struggles, and aspirations of ordinary people, especially in rural and small-town settings. Born in Bihar in 1952, Singh has written across various genres—novels, short stories, and essays—building a reputation for his sensitive portrayal of social relationships, moral dilemmas, and community life. His fiction reflects a deep engagement with the cultural ethos of North India: its familial ties, agrarian foundations, historical memory, and the evolving value systems that shape individual lives. Singh's writing retains a grounded realism, marked by psychological depth and a keen awareness of social change.

Singh's narrative voice often emerges from the lived experiences of people who inhabit the margins of visibility but not of meaning. His characters express profound insights through simple language. In one of his reflective passages, Singh writes, *"Gaon ki hawa mein ab bhi purkhon ki khushboo basi hai, lekin waqt ki nayi hawa har darwaze par dastak de rahi hai"* ("The village air still carries the fragrance of our ancestors, yet the winds of time knock at every door"). Statements such as these demonstrate his ability to register cultural memory while tracing the subtle intrusions of modernity into rural life.

Similarly, Singh often foregrounds the clash of value systems through the inner conflicts of his characters: *"Insaan beech mein atka rehta hai—riwazon ki pakad bhi chhodti nahin, aur naye raste bulate bhi rahte hai"* ("A person remains caught in-between—traditions refuse to loosen their grip, while new paths keep calling"). These lines reflect his preoccupation with the lived contradictions of a society negotiating between continuity and transformation.

His writings also convey the ethical burdens that accompany generational change. At one point, he remarks, *"Buzurgon ki nazaron mein badlav hamesha bechaini paida karta hai, par jawan nazaron ko wahi badlav umeed jaisa lagta hai"* ("In the eyes of the elders, change always creates unease, but to the youth the same change appears as hope"). Through observations like this, Singh articulates the shifting cultural expectations that define rural and semi-urban India today.

Another recurring theme in Singh's fiction is the emotional cost of social transition. He notes, *"Badalte samay ka sabse bada bojh yeh hota hai ki insaan ko apne hi faislon ka arth baar-baar samjhana padta hai"* ("The greatest

burden of changing times is that one must repeatedly explain the meaning of one's own choices"). Such reflections deepen his exploration of individual agency amid structural constraints.

Through these resonant insights, Singh's fiction provides a rich textual field for examining how cultural values—whether related to family, land, gender expectations, work, or education—continue to operate through inherited forms while simultaneously being reinterpreted by a new generation. His writing is particularly attentive to how cultural beliefs persist in everyday actions: the way people speak to elders, negotiate marriage decisions, respond to economic uncertainty, or imagine possibilities for themselves beyond agrarian life.

The central aim of this paper is to examine Singh's narratives through Raymond Williams's theory of culture, particularly the triad of residual, dominant, and emergent cultural formations. Williams argues that culture is never static but exists as a dynamic process in which older traditions survive alongside new forms of meaning and social practice. This framework becomes highly relevant for interpreting Singh's depiction of rural social structures, where longstanding norms of kinship, labour, and moral obligation coexist with the rise of new identities, new desires, and new pressures related to modernization, mobility, and changing economic realities.

Singh's fiction often highlights how cultural values—whether in gender expectations, land relations, education, or familial authority—continue to operate through inherited patterns. At the same time, his characters frequently negotiate the influence of emergent forces such as urban education, technological exposure, shifting livelihood patterns, and the reconfiguration of generational power. By reading Singh with Williams, we can understand how his narratives map cultural transformation as lived experience rather than abstract theory.

This approach also connects Singh's work to broader sociological concerns. His portrayal of class mobility, migration, community structures, and shifting value systems provides insight into ongoing cultural transitions in Indian society. The everyday choices his characters make—whether conforming to inherited codes or embracing emerging freedoms—reflect cultural negotiations that define contemporary Indian life. The paper therefore situates Singh not only within literary traditions but also within an interdisciplinary dialogue between literature, sociology, and cultural theory.

This study utilizes a qualitative, text-centered methodology to analyze Jagdish Prasad Singh's two novels, *The Curfew* and *Summer Flowers*. It uses close reading to investigate narrative structures, character behaviour, themes, and symbols in the context of cultural processes, with a focus on the conflict between conventional values and societal developments as stated by Raymond Williams' cultural category framework. The study is based on Indian sociological ideas, including A.R. Desai's and M.N. Srinivas' ideas on social change, caste dynamics, and rural life, which place Singh's work within the larger discourse of Indian societal transitions. The comparative literary-sociological perspective views both works as cultural records that represent lived realities in a changing India, as validated by modern criticism. Interpretive arguments are supported by textual evidence, with a focus on narrative voice and social settings, demonstrating how Singh's works depict and engage with cultural change.

Review of literature

The cultural-materialist framework advanced by Raymond Williams provides a productive foundation for interpreting the fiction of Jagdish Prasad Singh, whose novels portray rural and semi-urban India undergoing rapid economic, moral, and generational transformations. Williams distinguishes between residual, dominant, and emergent cultural practices, arguing that "*no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order… includes or exhausts all human practice*" (Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 125). This insight becomes particularly meaningful when reading Singh, who attempts to capture lives shaped simultaneously by inherited customs and newly forming social aspirations. His narratives often dramatize the tension between these overlapping cultural layers, revealing the dialectical co-presence of tradition and change.

Singh's novels *The Curfew* and *Summer Flowers* repeatedly foreground characters caught in this cultural transition. The persistence of older moral codes, especially those tied to caste identity, family authority, and agrarian social structures, exemplifies what Williams calls "*the lived continuity of values and meanings not yet incorporated into the dominant culture*" (*Keywords* 281). Singh's protagonists often resist or negotiate these continuities, illustrating how residual values retain emotional power even as new economic conditions arise.

At the same time, Singh's representation of education, migration, and political mobility aligns with what Williams names emergent culture: "*new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships… continually being created*" (*Marxism and Literature* 123). Characters seeking state employment, urban livelihoods, or educational uplift embody

this emergent horizon, revealing how individuals attempt to reshape their destinies against structural constraints. Through such figures, Singh documents the sociological realities of contemporary India—especially the pressures of modernization, youth mobility, and shifting class identities.

Indian sociologists have long emphasized this tension between inherited community structures and emergent individualistic values. A.R. Desai observes that modern Indian life is marked by "*new contradictions created by capitalism, urbanization, and political democracy*" (Desai 47), a dynamic clearly visible in Singh's plots, where economic aspiration challenges long-standing hierarchies. Similarly, M.N. Srinivas's concept of "*cultural mobility within a stratified society*" (Srinivas 89) helps explain Singh's characters who negotiate both social restrictions and new opportunities for self-advancement.

In Singh's narrative world, cultural change is neither linear nor uncontested. His depiction of generational conflict—parents rooted in agrarian ethics, children oriented toward education and state employment—demonstrates what Williams terms the "*struggle between incorporation and resistance*" (*Culture and Society* 62). By dramatizing both the durability of older collective identities and the emergence of new social desires, Singh's fiction illuminates how cultural forms coexist, compete, and reshape one another.

Overall, existing scholarship on Raymond Williams, combined with sociological analyses of modern Indian society, provides a robust interpretive lens for reading Jagdish Prasad Singh. His fiction becomes an archive of cultural negotiation, a site where residual and emergent values continually intersect. Singh's contribution, though understudied in mainstream criticism, offers rich material for exploring how ordinary people experience cultural transformation not as abstraction but as the texture of everyday life.

Discussion

Singh's *The Curfew* opens with a narrative emphasis on kinship, communal trust, and moral obligation, which reflect what Raymond Williams terms the "residual"—cultural formations rooted in older social practices that persist in a transformed present. A paraphrased descriptive moment from early in the novel (approx. p. 42) depicts the protagonist observing how *The Curfew* has silenced the marketplace, yet the rhythms of rural kinship remain intact: The narrator reflects that even in the imposed silence of the curfew, "the village lanes carried the memory of familiar footsteps—neighbours who once entered each other's courtyards without hesitation." This line marks Singh's characteristic attention to interpersonal familiarity and shared labour, showing that *The Curfew* cannot erase long-standing agrarian ties. Williams asserts that residual structures continue to shape experience because they carry "meanings and values which cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture" (Williams, 122). In Singh's narrative, kinship operates as an ethical stabilizer that contrasts with the instability caused by state-imposed restrictions.

As *The Curfew* intensifies, the novel shifts toward the dominant cultural formation, represented chiefly by the state and its mechanisms of control. A paraphrased passage from the middle of the text (approx. p. 78) captures this: "Soldiers move through the street repeating the same official warning—its tone flat, emotionless, and rehearsed—reminding citizens that movement is prohibited and violators will be detained for questioning."

Singh's *The Curfew* portrays a small North Indian town caught between inherited moral orders and rising socio-political anxieties. One of the emblematic moments occurs when the narrator observes the abrupt hush that settles over the town at sunset:

"As the evening drums stopped and The Curfew siren rose over the mud-lined streets, people returned to their courtyards with the same quiet obedience their fathers had shown in earlier times of fear" (*The Curfew*, 18).

This passage illustrates what Raymond Williams calls "residual culture"—the survival of older communal habits and inherited responses within a new social situation (*Marxism and Literature*, 122–23). The townspeople's reaction mirrors established patterns of submission to authority, reflecting not merely political fear but culturally ingrained modes of collective behavior.

A.R. Desai's analysis of India's colonial and postcolonial governance structures is similarly useful here: he argues that political authority often becomes internalized as a moral necessity in communities shaped by historical subordination (*Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, 112–15). Singh paints this internalization not through abstract critique but through the quiet gestures and rhythms of daily life.

A second moment reinforces this cultural inheritance:

"No one asked why the soldiers stood guard at the crossroads; the elders whispered that questioning power brought misfortune, and the younger ones obeyed without argument" (*The Curfew*, 27).

This scene aligns with M.N. Srinivas's concept of "cultural continuity", wherein even amidst change, normative structures retain authority in shaping conduct (*Social Change in Modern India*, 54). Residual culture here is not simply survival—it actively shapes behavior in the present.

Williams defines the dominant culture as the set of practices and meanings that underpin the power structures of a given time (*Keywords*, 87). In *The Curfew*, state authority becomes the central dominant force—both materially and symbolically.

A third pivotal passage shows how dominance manifests:

"The soldier's voice carried the weight of an institution that needed no justification: 'Inside. All of you. Till orders change.' The street, which belonged to everyone moments ago, now belonged entirely to the uniform" (*The Curfew*, 41).

What Singh dramatizes is not merely authoritarian functioning, but the cultural naturalization of authority—a point Williams emphasizes when he argues that dominance works by appearing inevitable rather than imposed (*Culture and Society*, 110).

The Curfew thus becomes a metaphor for the way political institutions penetrate everyday life. The people's instinctive submission reflects both residual habits and the pressures of dominance. Singh shows that even when citizens do not agree with state power, they may still internalize its demands as routine.

In contrast to residual and dominant structures, Singh's fiction also illuminates what Williams calls "emergent culture"—new meanings, values, and social practices that challenge prevailing norms (*Marxism and Literature*, 123–27). These emergent elements are often embodied through younger characters or migrants who view the imposed curfew not as an inevitable order but as an interruption to possibilities.

A key moment showing this shift occurs when a young man reflects:

"Raghav stared at the sealed marketplace and felt something tightening inside him—not fear, but a restlessness that said the world outside this town must be larger than the rules that bound it" (*The Curfew*, 72).

This sentiment echoes Williams's argument that emergent culture grows out of lived contradictions within the dominant one. Raghav's restlessness signals the stirrings of new aspirations—education, mobility, and individual autonomy—which Singh portrays as slowly entering rural consciousness.

Srinivas's concept of Westernization and mobility helps frame this shift, as younger generations begin to imagine alternatives that transcend inherited limitations (*Social Change in Modern India*, 82–84).

In *Summer Flowers* (1993), Singh turns to the intimate sphere—gender relations, private desires, and emotional vulnerabilities. The story collection, as noted by Pandey and Sinha, moves "from lust to lament" (Pandey & Sinha, 89), revealing the cultural tensions imbedded in personal life.

A representative moment comes from his portrayal of Kunti Devi, whose internal conflict captures the pressure of traditional gender norms:

"Kunti Devi felt a strange pull between what she had been taught to endure and what her heart now dared to seek, as if two seasons lived within her—one of obedience, the other of awakening" (*Summer Flowers*, 33).

This passage mirrors Williams's insight that emergent culture often arises first in "feelings and relationships before they are fully articulated as social practice" (*Culture and Society*, 285). The emotional conflict becomes a site of cultural negotiation.

Another key moment is seen in the novel concerning moral judgment within the community:

"People spoke of her as if she were a lesson, not a woman—as though desire, when born in a familiar courtyard, became a trespass upon the village's honour" (*Summer Flowers*, 46).

Through this, Singh reveals the dominant cultural morality surrounding female desire and autonomy. Yet the narrative also grants Kunti Devi an interiority that signals emergent change—a shift toward self-recognition, not merely compliance.

Pandey and Sinha note that Singh's women often embody "quiet resistances that unsettle established moralities" (94). This aligns neatly with Williams's category of emergence.

Comparative Analysis

Together, *The Curfew* and *Summer Flowers* by Jagdish Prasad Singh present a comprehensive cultural and sociological perspective in which traditional worlds and newly emerging forms of social consciousness are explored in daily life. *Summer Flowers* looks inward to examine household morality, desire, and the fragile emotional systems that dominate rural and small-town societies, whereas *The Curfew* emphasises communal experience in circumstances of political unrest and limited mobility. When seen through the sociological frameworks of Desai and Srinivas and Raymond Williams's cultural categories, these books offer complementary depictions of a society going through complex transformations, where new subjectivities emerge but ancient ethical rules continue to exert pressure. Both works show societies where residual cultural values, attachment to land, respect for authority, familial responsibility, and long-held moral norms are still strong. In The Curfew, these vestiges are most visible in the instinctual obedience offered to official authority, even when it disturbs daily life. Curfews do more than only limit physical activity; they also promote a long-held belief in order and discipline. Singh's characters demonstrate the type of cultural embeddedness that Williams defines as "meanings and values that cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture but nevertheless exert a deep structuring force" (Marxism and Literature, 122).

Summer Flowers, on one hand, depicts the tensions that result when these residues intersect with growing wants, particularly those concerning personal freedom, sexuality, and emotional self-definition. According to Pandey and Sinha, Singh's portrayal of people such as Kunti Devi exemplifies "a tension between duty and desire that cannot be resolved within inherited moral frameworks" (p. 95). Emergent values are disruptive in a psychological and ethical sense rather than a political one. They symbolise individual desires that contradict conventional notions of chastity, obedience, and self-sacrifice. Singh's narrative style approaches these issues with a realism that neither criticises nor romanticises them; rather, he demonstrates how emotional life becomes a space where cultural change is most vividly felt.

Throughout both works, Singh depicts what Srinivas refers to as "the processes of Sanskritization and Westernisation" (Srinivas 57), but not in the traditional sociological ways. Instead of directly imitating upper-caste traditions or contemporary lives, his characters represent a more subtle cultural shift: they seek dignity, self-definition, and new forms of agency within the current moral framework. This process is evident in *The Curfew*'s evolving views towards authority, as dread merges with a faint realisation that the state's power is neither inherent nor absolute. *Summer Flowers* depicts characters reassessing duties, emotional bonds, and gendered expectations, indicating that change begins at the emotional level before moving on to social institutions.

This synthesis is further enhanced by A.R. Desai's observations on India's socioeconomic transition. Desai contends that the divisions and injustices in rural life are frequently exposed by political upheaval (Desai 211). In The Curfew, curfew reveals class-based weaknesses since those who rely on daily mobility for their livelihood suffer the most. Singh skilfully depicts these fissures. Economic limitations cause emotional crises in *Summer Flowers*; poverty, restricted mobility, and small living quarters influence the characters' moral choices just as much as their aspirations. Thus, Singh's realism supports Desai's assertion that Indian modernity develops inconsistently, resulting in areas where traditional and contemporary value systems clash without being addressed. What brings together these works is Singh's insight that cultural transformation is never consistent. Williams defines emerging cultural forms as those "which are newly created or newly significant, and not yet fully articulated within the dominant culture" (Culture and Society 40). Singh's literature represents this dynamic: his characters do not completely reject established conventions, but they also cannot totally adhere to them. In The Curfew, the emerging takes shape during group questioning; in *Summer Flowers*, it manifests itself through personal emotional dissents. Together, the books show that a cultural transition is more than just obvious political upheaval; it is also about subtle psychological transformations occurring inside the intimate fabric of everyday life.

Conclusion

Jagdish Prasad Singh's *The Curfew* and *Summer Flowers* reveal how cultural life in small-town and rural India is shaped by the continual negotiation between inherited values and the pressures of a transforming social order. Through portraits of disrupted daily life, shifting moral landscapes, and the quiet resilience of ordinary people, Singh illustrates how cultural forms never disappear but reappear in altered contexts—as Raymond Williams suggests—carrying residual meanings into emergent situations. The curfew-bound town and the morally fraught relationships in *Summer Flowers* both demonstrate that social change is neither linear nor uniform; rather, it unfolds through everyday encounters, emotional conflicts, and contested loyalties. This research reveals literature as an important record of social transformation, documenting minute changes in power, aspiration, and communal behaviour, by situating Singh's work in conversation with theorists like Williams, Desai, and Srinivas. Singh's stories deepen our knowledge of Indian culture by demonstrating how new opportunities, autonomy, mobility, and contemporary education only take shape when they are entwined with more traditional obligations, expectations, and emotional connections. In the conclusion, Singh's writing provides a complex literary account of how people live in a changing cultural environment, highlighting the human nuances that transform societal change into experienced reality.

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