Chapter 2:
Resistance Literature
Chapter 2

Resistance Literature

"Staging Resistance" is an assertive title which embodies an idea of the engagement of study with the theatrical form of the performance art i.e. the genre of drama. "Staging" means the performance of plays on the platform. The "staging" of a play refers to the physical spectacle of a drama that is presented to the audience in performance by the performers. It represents the carefully selected actions by living people on a stage in front of the audience. It is communication with the audience through speaking out the dialogues, gestures and other movements. "Staging Resistance" refers to the presentation of the theme of resistance through performance in order to reach the audience.

The concept of Resistance has drawn the attention of the scholars from the fields of history, sociology, political science, cultural studies and anthropology. Of late, the representation of resistance in literary writings is also being explored. Literature is exposing how resistance practices in everyday life are formulating the literary genres. "Of all the literary genres, drama has the greatest potential to reach the emotions of an audience" (Charters et al. 1119) and therefore the staging of the theme of resistance can have a strong emotional effect on the audience.

In the plays chosen for study the presence of resistance is noticed in the overall assertion of the self through the aggressive tone of the protagonists. The playwrights stage those women who are aware, sensitive and also conscious of the indigenous traditions and culture. They are marked by the imperatives of saying "No", thus giving impetus to what is appropriated as resistance. The plays insist on re-thinking of the past and eliminating the traditional hegemonic biases that silenced and obstructed the identity of women - the subaltern and marginalised group. Resistance involves re-interpretation and bringing them to the centre. It insists on hearing female voices and giving consideration to the dispossessed, subjugated, powerless and suppressed.

By its semantic nature, the term "resistance" is a derivative of "resist" which is derived from the Old French "resister" and the Latin "resistere", from re - 'expressing opposition' and sister - 'stop' (Soanes et al. 1224). According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, resistance is "refusal to obey". It is an act of opposing something and trying to stop it from happening. It is an expression of strong disagreement with something. It can be a statement or an action that expresses resistance. It is to say or do
something to show that you disagree with or disapprove of something. It is to fight back when attacked. It is also an act of using force to stop something from happening. It is doing something you very much want to do (Hornby 1086-1087). Thus “Resistance is much less revolutionary activity” (Lauter 08).

The meaning of the “protest” according to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary is the expression of some strong disagreement with or opposition to something. It can be a statement or an action. It is to say or do something to show that you disagree with or disapprove of something especially publicly (Hornby 1019). “The term protest projects a multiple experience, agitating, energising, ennobling and yet delighting all at the same time” (Agnihotri 26).

The difference between protest and resistance as observed is that - protest has conventionally been overt, planned, organised and conscious, and is demonstrated publicly whereas resistance is covert, spontaneous and hence not planned. In the plays selected for study, the resistance by the protagonists is not organised. It is the spontaneous resulting of the hurt feelings and the injustice meted to them. According to Haynes and Prakash, “Resistance should be defined as those behaviours by subordinate groups that contest hegemonic social formations but threaten to unravel the strategies of domination. ‘Consciousness’ need not be essential to its constitution” (Haynes and Prakash 03). It implies a slow and insistent behavioural strategy as is expressed by the protagonists of the plays. Such strategy has a potential to displace the dominant structure though it may not put an overall end to it.

Women’s resistance is different from protest or revolt. Though protest too is an expression of objection by words or by actions to particular events, certain policies or situations, it takes many different forms, from individual statements to mass demonstrations. Unlike in resistance, protestors publicly make their opinions heard in an attempt to influence public opinion or government policy or they may undertake direct action in an attempt to directly enact desired changes themselves. In resistance there is no mass demonstration. It is a peaceful campaign to achieve a particular objective and it involves in persuasion. Protests are sometimes restricted by governmental policy, economic circumstances, religious orthodoxy, social structures or media monopoly. When such restrictions occur, protests may assume the form of open disobedience. Thus protest is a formal declaration of disapproval or objections issued by a concerned person, group or organisation. It is public, often organised manifestation of such dissent.
There is much argument as regards the nature of resistance in literature. Many critics argue that it is non-literary. According to Paul Lauter, "It is a social dynamic, and the relationship of art . . . to such social movements is always, at best, ambiguous and conflicted" (Lauter 12). Brian Norman considers it non-literary on the grounds that it is "too polemical, ephemeral, or earnestly partisan . . . non-literary, merely political, or journalistic, or in some way positions it as subsidiary" (Norman 111). But resistance has its place in literature and it is expressed in various modes by the women playwrights in their plays. Resistance is usually by the subordinate group which is also called the subaltern group which resists the undue subjugation. The subaltern group consists of peasants, industrial workers, urban labourers, etc. and women too. These groups have always been in confrontation with those who dominated them. Domination gives rise to resistance and resistance in turn emerges as the consequence of power-play. There is the interplay between domination and resistance.

Resistance is represented in the plays by women who have turned their attention to "everyday forms of resistance" (Scott 29). In the family too there is the dominated class i.e. women who resist, defy and disavow this structure though it is done unconsciously without any plan or an organisation. It is just an unconscious exhibition of their anger over their subjugation. They represent the modest forms of struggles. Hence it can be described as a "non-confrontational and contestatory behaviour and constantly present in the behaviours, traditions and consciousness of the subaltern" having the power to "tear through the fabric of hegemonic forms" (Haynes et al. 02). Resistance thus is a subtle act and can be expressed covertly by speech, gestures, actions, mood and even by silence. As Carla Rice points out, "resistance can be quietly subversive; it can be humorous and playful or serious and painful" (Rice 177). According Hegland, "Covert Resistance can be defined as the unarticulated and round about form of resistance . . . rather than open, verbal contradiction" (Hegland 425).

The study of eighteen plays by women aims at extending and re-examining the perspectives of the scholars regarding resistance by exploring the place of resistance in the Indian family, society, history, legends and mythology. These plays taken together suggest that the notion of resistance be rethought and reconsidered so that it can be applied to a much wider range of socio-cultural practices. It also helps discover the ways in which the individual self and the feelings of women are conditioned and modified by the dominants representing the power-structure. These plays establish the struggle in everyday life in yet another sense. All the playwrights have placed all forms of resistance
within the ordinary life of women. They study the ways in which the individual, the family and the social relations of daily existence are entangled and thereby transfigured by resistance. In these plays the women protagonists struggle and try their best to break and rupture the domination of the male authority in order to get their dues and rights. In their resistance as James Scott describes, “They require little or no co-ordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms” (Scott 29).

Another opinion expressed by Haynes and Prakash is that the resistance of “subordinated peoples need not be dramatic or informed by conscious ideologies of opposition to seriously affect relations of domination. To use resistance in its more traditional sense would mean not to consider the very processes by which power is often tested and eroded by the actions of the subordinate and by which it reconstitutes itself in response” (Haynes et al. 04). The playwrights are of the opinion that struggles in everyday life can grow into large-scale and conscious challenges to the political or social order as they exhibit in their plays. Thus resistance writer adopts what Ralph Ellison calls, “a role beyond that of entertainer” (quoted in Trodd xvi). Sometimes resistance writer’s role is to be “the man who told you something you already know” as Woody Guthrie said (quoted in Greenway 289). The resistance writers use their words as swords and their pens as weapons. Douglas claims that words are useful “as they stimulate to blows” (Douglas 526). Wright imagines “using words as a weapon, using them as one would use a club” (Wright 248). Harry J. Elam opines, “Resistance does not entail just physical opposition to injustice, but internal and psychological evolutions and mutual communication towards a common goal” (Elam 121). The representation of resistance in these plays articulates both the existence of the dominant power-structure and the female desire to disavow and defy that structure. In doing so it recovers the female voice.

Resistance literature is thus a writing which resists against domination and wishes to change the existing situation to allow for empowerment. The Palestinian writer-critic Ghassan Kanafani used the term “resistance” for the first time in 1966 in his work Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine. The term “Resistance Literature” was first introduced by Barbara Harlow who brought out the role of literature in armed struggles. In her Resistance Literature she included the literature of Africa, Latin America and Asia which were engaged in armed struggle for liberation. She explains how the struggles for national independence have produced “a significant corpus of literary writing, both narrative and poetic as well as a broad spectrum of theoretical analysis of the political,
ideological and cultural parameters of struggle . . . Literature, in other words, is presented by the critic as an arena of struggle" (Harlow xvi, 02).

In 1997 a renowned theatre critic Nandi Bhatia introduced the term “Staging Resistance” when she wrote an article on the Indian theatre titled “Staging Resistance: The Indian People’s Theatre.” In 2004 she published her book Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance: Theatre and Politics in Colonial and Post-Colonial India. In India the tradition of women’s writing has retrieved the suppressed identities by highlighting their everyday activities. The voluminous work of Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, the path breaking articles in journals like Manushi in English, Indian Journal of Gender Studies, Economic and Political Weekly and other journals in the regional languages, the books published by Kali for Women and Seagull Books have attempted to publish resistance literature.

In the plays selected for study there is anger and frustration of women born of the helplessness of the situation and not out of any unified struggle for freedom. They present individual insurgencies and exhibit that “Resistance can not be produced on demand to be participated in or written about, but that it is always there as actuality and potential in the everyday structures of life, even in its most seemingly disheartened and depoliticised moments which in turn redefine the future” (Sundar xix). The plays collectively highlight resistance in the everyday family and social life. They point at the ordinary, personal or individual struggle of a woman who exhibits her struggles through her behaviours as opposed to the cultural practices and conditioning of hers. These forms of resistance or struggles are different from those of overt revolt. The playwrights have presented the everyday life as a site for the study of resistance. The study of their resistance provides the basis for the re-examination of literary critical theories and methodologies and the various definitions whereby a collection of literary texts as literature of resistance is established. In order to study resistance it is necessary to have “academic objectivity” or “scientific dispassion” (Harlow 03).

Resistance literature is written within a specific context against the domination. Resistance literature by women is unfolding itself as the history of their century-old oppression and subjugation. The position of women in the society where their “life is cheap and where slavish multitudes grovel under a variety of despotisms” (Wolf 06) can be taken as the basis for resistance. The need of the time demanded that literature must be rewritten to include the “people without history” (Wolf) i. e. women. Alfred Sauvy, a French demographer and social scientist said that these “ignored, scorned, exploited” people “also want to say something” (quoted in Harlow 05). Women through their
literature began to assert not only their independence but also started assigning these new aspirants for freedom the historical, social and human status in the family and thereby in the society at large. Inevitably these women became the intellectual instruments in the enrichment of literature thereby bringing in the social transformation. Literature by women is thus imposing a review of the representation of women who are derided as the “other”, “vulnerable”, “second sex”, “second forever”, “subaltern” of man and “inferior” to man. It leads to the unfolding of the history of resistance over the Ages through the scriptures too. They are being brought to the forefront and in the mainstream literature. Therefore as Ngugi maintained, in literature one comes across two opposing aesthetics: the aesthetic of oppression and that of human struggle for liberation (Ngugi 38) which are discernible in women’s plays.

a. Development of Indian Resistance Literature:

“Woman must write her self; must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away so violently as from their bodies for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text as into the world and into history - by her own movement” (Cixous 75).

Women’s taking to writing is in itself an act of resistance. They have started writing about their agonies. They are also trying to trace the history of their writing and establishing a female tradition of writing which is against the canonical writing. This act can be viewed as resistance. Their efforts to discover and make available the writings of women from earlier times have been of immense value. The Jamaican writer Michelle Cliff is of the opinion that “if one does not know how one’s people have resisted, then it makes resistance difficult” (Cliff 280). Cliff’s words stand as much for political resistance as for female resistance in the literary field. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita are of the opinion that women’s writings have often been engaged in resisting the politics of gender and “have deflected and refigured the course of dominance” (Tharu et al.116). They write about this elaborately in their introduction to Women Writing in India.

In India women’s resistance need to be understood against the background of cultural, historical and colonial contexts within which they are placed and the premise from which they function. The colonial intervention in the nineteenth century was no longer confined only to the market or polity but was intruding into the areas of Indian culture, society and family and that could affect transformation in the social fabric of Indian society. During the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries a number of legislative
steps were taken, first, to put an end to the exploitative practices against women and secondly to raise their position vis-à-vis men. These were the Social Reform Movements of the nineteenth century and the Nationalist Movement of the twentieth century. Both these movements raised the question of equal status of women through legislation, political action and propagation of education. Besides, the concept of “New Woman” was being highlighted by those women who were in the nationalist struggle. Radha Kumar points out that when women started participating in social reform movements and the freedom struggle, they got awareness about their positioning and made bold of themselves to come out to campaign for reforms (Kumar 01).

The issues which attracted the attention of the social reformers of the nineteenth century were Sati, the ill-treatment of widows, the ban on widow marriage, polygyny, child marriage, and denial of property rights and education to women. The reformers felt that these social evils should be eradicated by raising consciousness and making people sensitive to the injustice perpetrated on women. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidya Sagar, M. G. Ranade, Maharshi Karve, Mahatma Phule, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda were the main reformers who raised their voices against unjust practices. Even the intellectual Muslims sought a change in the condition of Muslim women as symbolic of their desire “for change in the social order” (Ali 04).

Another very powerful force which helped to change the position of and attitude towards women was the Nationalist Movement particularly during the Gandhian phase. Women left their seclusion in large numbers to participate in the struggle for independence. Though Gandhi listed equality of women in his Nine-Point Programme, women’s rights were not the primary goal of the Movement. However, women gained political experience and confidence which extended their sphere of action beyond their homes.

The main thrust of education to women was to justify and inculcate the feminine virtues such as “chastity, self-sacrifice, submissiveness, devotion, kindness, patience, and the labour of love” (Chartterjee 129). There was an attempt to reform women rather than reform the social conditions that oppressed them. There was no attempt to alter the power structures and the man-woman relations in the society. The attempt was to create a new Indian woman, truly Indian yet sufficiently educated and tutored in the nineteenth century values to suit the new emerging society. Rekha Pande et al. assert that “Thus education for girls was not meant to equip them to be self-sufficient, independent, emancipated and train them to follow some profession, but to be good housewives, the mistress of the home and the hearth” (quoted in Pande 28). The patriarchy accepted this...
education as it was meant to inculcate in women the feminine virtues. Thus in the construction of new woman, the cultural refinement was the goal of education. However, women started reaping the benefits of formal education enthusiastically.

Though a large part of women’s education in the nineteenth century focused on creating a “compassionate” woman, some still slipped through the net. The depth and quality of their resistance and the level of consciousness can be gained from the writings by three outstanding nineteenth century women - Tarabai Shinde (1850-1910), Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) and Anadibai Joshi (1865-1889). The lives of Pandita Ramabai and Tarabai Shinde are good examples of rebellious Brahmin widows who refused to content with leading a life of misery and destitution. Education for these women was not merely a means to an end. Both these women rejected the confines of domestic respectability. The boldness they articulated in expressing their views through their writings is unique for their times. Their writings were signals of a rebellious consciousness. The positive sociological changes were evident when these spirited women took bold steps to reap the benefits of education to further the cause of social change. Since then many women writers have been breaking their silence through their writings so as to reveal the sense of the wrong suffered. Thus the consciousness of resistance in terms of women’s agency came in India much earlier to the advent of feminism. Thus from the brief over-view of the Indian women’s movements, it is not difficult to conjecture that feminism in India emerged out of the external and also from the internal socio-historical realities and that right from its inception it acquired an indigenous character, rejecting the Western model. Discussing the emergence of feminism in the Third World countries Kumari Jayawardena categorically states that feminism was not “imposed” on the Third World by the West. On the contrary it was the product of the historical circumstances that brought about “ideological changes affecting women” (Jayawardena 02).

Thus women’s resistance literature “... seeks to express that which has been submerged and suppressed” (Jain 08). Thus writing by women in itself is an act of resistance. They resorted to different strategies to say what they wished to and deconstructed literary forms and social constructs and continued to “struggle with the ghosts of their fathers and the inheritance of their mothers. And they invite the reader to do the same” (Jain 09). In doing the same, women will spot their resisting consciousness and work towards the social change.
b. Feminisms and Feminist Theory:

"Feminists believe that women have been subordinated through men’s greater power, variously expressed in different areas. They value women’s lives and concerns, and work to improve women’s status" (DeVault 27).

The aim of discussion here is to explore the ways in which Feminisms and Feminist Theory have influenced the study on resistance literature. Feminism basically means the assertion of female identity. It is a construct by which women have tried to establish parity in all areas of human life. It tries to provide human life to every woman. It is a diverse collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies. As a social movement feminism largely focuses on the issues in the patriarchal society and tries to limit and eradicate gender inequality. As a political movement it tries to promote women’s rights and their interests. It tries to empower women in understanding themselves, breaking their silence and the tyranny of victimisation and to deconstruct power-politics. As a moral philosophy it tries to bring in changes in the lives of every woman through consciousness-raising.

Feminist Theory has been evolved over several decades. The initial contribution of the Feminist Theory is that it has brought attention to the unique situation of women, generated research about women, and exposed and eliminated discriminatory conditions and oppressive social roles. Thus it necessitated a quest to know and understand what it is to be a woman. It demands resistance to their silencing, invisibility and the non-acknowledgement of their contributions starting from domestic space to the wider ones. Feminist resistance gets articulated not only through the Women’s Movement but also through women’s individual endeavours which may range from the silent rejection of the male domination to the violent reaction through contestatory behaviours and actions. It has helped to bring the multiple situations of men and women together to focus on socially constructed gender relations. It aims at understanding the nature of gender inequality by examining women’s roles in the family and the society, and their experiences. It has led to the developments of theories in a variety of disciplines in order to deal with the issues such as the social construction of gender. It is the extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical fields. It encompasses work in a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, economics, women’s studies, literary criticism, art, history, psychoanalysis and philosophy. While providing a critique of the social and political relations, much of the theory focuses on the promotion of women’s
rights and interests. The themes explored in the feminist theory include discrimination, stereotyping, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression and patriarchy. Thus the theory is driven by the basic questions about women like - what about women, why women's situation the way it is, how one can change and improve the social world and what about differences among women.

In the field of literary criticism, Elaine Showalter describes the development of feminist theory as having three phases. The first she calls "feminist critique", in which the feminist reader examines the ideologies behind literary phenomena. The second is "gynocriticism", in which the woman is a producer of textual meaning. She calls the last phase as the "gender theory", in which the *the ideological inscription and the literary effects of the sex/gender system are explored* (Showalter 1985 25-33).

Feminist Theory has relevance and validity for more reasons than one in studying resistance in these plays. Jasbir Jain says *"Working through radical movements and silent changes, through legal and political battles and psychological barriers, women are learning to know and discover themselves"* (Jain xiv). Jain also asserts strongly that, "Women have had to discard their passivity, rebel against their merger into a permanent 'other' and to realise the nature of desire" (Jain xv). With all its variety, timidity and marginality the Feminist Theory has been moving through self-expression and self-questioning towards self-assertion and redefinitions. Feminist Theory is largely motivated by and is concerned with the experiences of women especially in their social, political and economic situations. The growth of the Feminist Theory has triggered the re-reading and re-conceptualisation of literature by women. The already existing and the emerging women's writings across the genres have opened up the deeper insights into women's status in a patriarchal society and its sexist biases. Literature is much faster in confronting the challenges and appropriating the opportunities offered by the newer developments in Feminist Theory. The study of the plays with their theme of resistance subscribes to this theory. Besides, the contemporary discourses of post-colonialism, post-structuralism and post-modernism have shaped the concept of resistance which in turn shapes the social order.

In the process of the analysis of the plays different theories intersect and bring out how the playwrights have unknowingly deconstructed the patriarchal structure. Feminist Theory has been able to draw attention to the concepts of difference, subalternity, mutedness, oppression, exploitation, discrimination, inequalities, refusals, constraints, separations, misrepresentations and exclusion of women folk. The desire of women to
come out of these is reflected in the plays. It is this desire that provides the basis and the context for resistance. The question of power has been central to all the theorists who strived to bring in the changes in the existing social, economic, cultural and political conditions concerning gender. Thus while analysing the theme of resistance, one finds the intersection of several theories which overlap. e. g. Post-modernism is a cultural phenomenon. Though it sprang to life in architecture, it spread rapidly into literature and art. It has helped stimulate and transform the feminist thinking and practices. Post-modern Feminist Theory challenges the accepted ideas on caste/race, class and gender as well as political rights which are basic to the values of the Women’s Movement.

The primary political goal of feminism is greater equality between men and women; postmodern feminism presses beyond this, seeking for everyone the “erasure of other invidious divisions, especially those based on race or ethnicity, and for open access to economic resources, educational opportunities, and political power” (Lorber 264). Postmodern Feminist Theory rethinks gender and power relations in the society. It targets gender as a primary arena for action. In an attempt to undermine the gender system which creates and sustains oppression, this theory encourages deconstruction, revision or to transcend the dualistic categories of gender that are constructed and reinforced by traditional practices.

The categories of feminism such as liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist, and post-feminism have been described extensively in the feminist writings across disciplines. Liberal feminism emphasises the attainment of political rights, opportunities and equality within the existing political system. Socialist feminism attributes women’s oppression to sexism, racism/casteism and class divisions which are produced by capitalism. Radical feminism finds patriarchy an omnipresent influence that needs to be dismantled. Marxist feminism highlights that within the same class men are the privileged sex while women are confined to unpaid domestic labour or underpaid work. Marxist feminists note that the universality of biological functions as reproduction and the restrictions it imposes upon women are reasons enough for all women to reject the unpleasant and unfair distinctions of social and economic class and unite under a common banner which would take care of their needs as women. Post-feminism as a concept has been used variously as an affirmation and a critique to describe women’s attitudes and issues of identity. These feminisms exhibit the power-politics between men and women. In deconstruction, the presumed fixity of the existing social orders is destabilised and the perspectives of the marginalised are articulated. These theories are anti-authoritarian movements. The
playwrights share the agendas of these theories and of feminisms concerning women. Their attempts to redress injustices are the significant dimensions of the themes in their plays. Feminist Theory has helped the playwrights who have found the categories of class, caste and gender extremely useful in understanding and fulfilling the mission of overcoming oppression.

Thus the feminist methodology promoted research practice that encouraged "bringing women back in," thus remedying their previous exclusion and "revealing both the diversity of actual women's lives and the ideological mechanisms that have made so many of those lives invisible" (DeVault 30). Ultimately, feminist research methodology is intended to promote social change to benefit women. The feminist overtones that are visible in the plays are - they have women's voices which disrupt dualisms such as public/private spaces that implicitly privilege men.

c. Resistance Literature and Feminist Criticism:

The Feminist writing, as Rajeswari Sunder Rajan reminds us, "is by no means a single or homogeneous body of speculation and argument" (Sunder Rajan 103). If at all one discerns a common strand in the great diversity of feminist scholarship, it is its critique of the patriarchal modes of thinking. The Indian and the Western feminist writers alike lay bare the patriarchal practices in their literary discourses. Elaine Showalter observes, "In its earliest years, feminist criticism concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassments of women in classic and popular male literature and the exclusion of women from literary history" (Showalter 1985 05).

In Indian literature the three influential works deserve special mention in this respect. These texts form the solid basis for the later developments in feminist theory. They are Stree Purusha Tulana (1882) by Tarabai Shinde (1850-1910); The High-Caste Hindu Woman (1887) by Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) and the letters written to her husband by Anadibai Joshi (1865-1889).

Tarabai Shinde's now famous essay Stri Purusha Tulna (1882) translated as A Comparison between Women and Men (1994) with a subtitle An Article Penned by Tarabai Shinde with the Purpose of Making a Comparison between Men and Women and Intending to Explain as to Who - the Men or Women - Are the More Brave. It remained virtually unknown until 1975. "Her bold exposure of patriarchal oppression was so far ahead of her times that the public lapse of memory in this case can not be an accident."
. . . She has the distinction of being the first Indian feminist literary critic" (Bhagwat 27). It was published in 1882 in response to an article that had appeared in Pune Vaibhav with regard to a hotly discussed incident. A young widow named Vijayalakshmi had been sentenced to death by the court for committing infanticide. The essay demonstrates how men themselves are the perpetrators of the very vices they so often locate in women calling them immoral. Tarabai offered the first fully worked-out analysis of the patriarchal society. She writes “I’ve written this small book to defend the honour of my entire sister countrywomen. I am not looking at particular castes or families here. It’s a comparison just between women and men” (O’Hanlon 75). She takes one by one every single representation by men of female nature in authoritative Sanskrit and vernacular literature, cultural and religious canons and refutes them point by point. Her exposure of male stereotypes of women appeared almost a century before Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex. A similar strategy was adopted by Beauvoir in her The Second Sex.

The autobiography of Pandita Ramabai A Testimony and many other important books, including The High-Caste Hindu Woman (1887), and Stree Dharma Neeti (Morals for Women) written both in English and Marathi stand testimony to her theoretical clarity, analytical vigour and realism. She took the courageous step of accepting Christianity even though she belonged to the Brahmin family. She waged a battle against both the Hindu and the Christian religious hierarchies as well as against their masculinist social norms. In her The High-Caste Hindu Woman she made a bold attack on the patriarchal order. The third section of the book Rewriting History (1998) by Uma Chakravarti on the life of Pandita Ramabai provides a fascinating insight into the lives and struggles of the upper-caste Brahmin widows and to understand women’s resistance in the nineteenth century.

Anandibai Joshi (1865-89) was the first Indian woman to study modern medicine in Women’s Medical College in Philadelphia in 1886. Her letters to her husband from America provide her insights into the Hindu and the Christian patriarchal systems. She saw through the strategies employed by the modern and progressive Indian educated men in the period of anti-colonial nationalism to mould “new” Indian woman to suit their needs and tastes. Anandibai did not change her religion like Pandita Ramabai. She regarded slavery and subjugation as the things in the world which she most disliked.

These three women writers of nineteenth century left behind a rich heritage of women’s resistance literature. Besides these writers, there were other women who highlighted women’s subjugation in their works. Simantini Updesh (1882) which while attacking the practice of dowry and women’s love for jewellery, aims at dismantling
women's view of themselves as the "other". Shevantibai Nikambe's *Ratanbai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Young Wife* (1895) exposes the contemporary prejudices against women's education, especially the education of married girls and young widows. Ratanbai - a Maratha Brahmin girl resists the opposition of her husband's relatives and also many troubles created by them. Ratan, however, gets over all these difficulties and goes on receiving education till the return of her husband from abroad who finds her a worthy partner of his life.

What makes these books so remarkable is that they cover contentious domains. They are not only about the emergence of a new kind of subjectivity of Indian women, but also about caste, class, conversion, colonialism and national consciousness. They locate women's defiance of conventional, moral and social structures and their desire to deconstruct the ideal woman who is subordinated and created by male power structures.

Susie Tharu and K. Lalita from their location in the Indian academy create a separate tradition of Indian women's writing and to rewrite literary history from their position of the post-colonial feminists. Their anthology has brought out a large amount of texts written by women in various Indian languages, right from the days of Buddhist nuns in the sixth century B.C. to 1990s. These two critics have also tried to place women writers and their works in their proper historical context, keeping in mind not only the issues of gender but also those of class and caste.

As the early feminists were mainly concerned with social and political change, little attention was paid to literature and literary criticism at the initial stage of the women's movement. But soon enough their political action was extended to the cultural field as it is here that gender differences are created and naturalised. Literature has played a predominant role in the development of such an approach - the recognition of women's cultural roles and their endeavours and achievements. In the western world the struggle is marked by such works as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869).

Virginia Woolf in her *A Room of One's Own* (1929) highlighted the economic, educational and cultural disabilities of women within the patriarchal society. She also pointed out how these disabilities have hindered and prevented women from realising their potentialities. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* launched a more radical feminist critical mode in France. The book is a wide-ranging critique of the cultural identification of women as merely the object and the "other" to man who is the
dominating subject and is considered to represent the humanity in general. Secondly, the book also deals with women in the works of many men-authors.

Katharine M. Roger's book *The Troublesome Helpmate* (1966) is a study of sexism in literature. Mary Ellmann with her brilliant and witty work *Thinking about Women* (1968) inaugurated modern feminist theory in America. She discusses deftly the derogatory stereotypes of women in literature written by men. Next in line comes the more influential and hard-hitting *Sexual Politics* (1969) by Kate Millett. She analyses that the dominance of man and the subordination of woman is established and perpetuated by the covert ways of manipulating power by the social institutions. She, by analysing the passages by D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and Norman Mailer, reveals the ways in which the authors, in their fictional fantasies aggrandise their aggressive selves and degrade women as submissive sexual objects. She exposes their patriarchal bias and their textual and sexual harassment of women.

In the late 1970s three major studies on women were published which tried to reconstruct the female literary tradition. Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) - all these books have become the modern classics of feminist approach to literature. Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* traces a female literary tradition in the English novel from the Brontes to 1970s and demonstrates that the development of this tradition is similar to the development of any literary subculture. She discovers three major phases of historical development which she claims to be common to all literary movements:

"First, there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is phase of protest against these standards and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages - feminine, feminist and female" (Showalter 1977 13) (emphasis mine).

The British female tradition is accordingly divided rather neatly into three phases: (1) The Feminine phase from 1840-1880 (2) The Feminist phase from 1880-1920 and (3) The Female phase from 1920 to 1970s. The real value of the book lies in its rediscovery
of lesser known women authors and their works. Because of her efforts many unknown and forgotten novelists are now beginning to come into the limelight. Her definitions are useful and widely held.

But Toril Moi has realised that they generate queries. She points out that all female writing i.e. writing by women is not necessarily feminist writing. There are many women who are indifferent to feminism. In 1986 writing an essay on “Feminist Literary Criticism”, she concludes,

"We can now define as female, writing by women, bearing in mind that this label does not say anything at all about the nature of that writing; as feminist, writing which takes a discernible anti-patriarchal and anti-sexist position; and as feminine, writing which seems to be marginalized (repressed, silenced) by the ruling social/linguistic order” (Moi 1986 220) (emphasis in the original).

The Madwoman in the Attic enjoys a privileged status in feminist circles along with A Literature of their Own. The text aims, on the one hand, to describe the “distinctively female literary tradition” (Gilbert and Gubar xi) of the nineteenth century and on the other hand to propound a complex theory of woman’s creativity. They argue that since creativity is defined as male in the patriarchal culture, the women writers of the nineteenth century suffer from an intense anxiety of authorship.

One charge that is levelled against Feminist Theory is that it has not paid sufficient attention to the problems of marginality created by class and caste/race in addition to gender. This may be the reason why the Black feminists in the West and Dalit women in India have felt the need of establishing a separate literary and critical corpus for themselves. From her site in the Western academy Chandra Talpade Mohanty reminds the First World feminists that “beyond sisterhood there is racism, colonialism and imperialism” (Mohanty 77). However it is Bell Hooks who traces the history of Black feminism through the resistance of the slaves, and points out that histories go a long way in creating the basis both of resistance and of antagonisms.

Like Mohanty another Indian from her location in the Western academy, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak detects and decries a “colonialist move” in the Western feminist theory as it “celebrates the heroines of the First World in a singular and individualist and the collective presence of women elsewhere in a pluralized and inchoate fashion”
She does not deny that Indian women have suffered a great deal of oppression and injustice at the hands of native patriarchs.

The feminist critics in the post-colonial India have still to fight an arduous battle against the established patriarchal structures in the country which still continue to control and restrict the lives of women in one form or the other. The cultural representations of women in the images of Sita and Savitri who are known for their exceptional devotion to their husbands still exist in popular media as well as in serious literature. The traditional role of women as dutiful daughters, devoted wives and self-sacrificing mothers are valorised in most of the fiction and also in popular films. Yet their writings are turning aside the Indian woman from her traditional roles and chores, facilitating her easy and efficient performance and thereby justifying her Indian identity.

d. Resistance Literature and Indian Women Writers:

It was a popular belief everywhere in the world that women were intellectually inferior to, physically weaker and mentally feeble creatures than men. But this notion is challenged by women. It became necessary for them to empower themselves socially, politically, economically and legally through emancipation of the self but this emancipation demanded "to battle with a certain phantom . . . And the phantom was a woman . . . called . . . the Angel in the House" (Woolf 64) and also the slaughter of this Angel. Woolf implies that women have to fight against themselves to assert their self. They had to undergo "the conflict between personal aspirations and social compulsions, between individual freedom and the institution of marriage" (Jain xix). Women started challenging the rationale behind unequal power relations which governed all institutions. As Michel Foucault, the French critic notes, "Power-relations are dependent upon a number of deftly-designed strategies. Most important one of these strategies is the tendency on the part of the dominant to ceaselessly refuse to acknowledge the dominated subject's separate identity and the dominant power structures constantly strive to drive a wedge between the oppressed group, gender or class to which she belongs. The victimization of woman can be seen as related to a larger exploitative pattern perpetuated by patriarchy" (Foucault 125). For women, writing became a subversive attempt to undermine the challenges posed by patriarchy. Many Indian women writers asserted themselves by talking their self and expressed resistance through their female characters through different genres.
Krupabai Sathianadhan's novels *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* (1894) and *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895) are bold attempts to challenge the oppressive Hindu traditions. Both the novels are Krupabai's own life-story. The writer gives the elaborate accounts of the conversion of her orthodox Hindu Brahmin parents. She forcefully criticises the denial of education to girls. Both the protagonists are known for their defiant attitude towards constricting traditional norms.

Through her short-stories Cornelia Sorabji, a Parsi-Christian, has protested against the evil practices of the society. In her *Love and Life behind the Purdah* (1901) she constructs the lived reality of the secluded life of women. Her question is whether love and exciting life are possible behind the purdah. Her note of resistance against the evil practice of child-marriage rings high in the stories *Pestilence at Noonday, Love and Death* and *Living Sacrifice*. The reformative spirit is distinct in most of her stories. Her novel *Shubala: A Child Mother* (1920) is her resistance against the child marriage.

Toru Dutt (1856-1877) is often hailed as the “first woman writer of English in India.” Though her posthumous novel, *Bianca or The Young Maiden* does not have any overt feminist inclination, it unmistakably draws the attention to the problems of gender and the patriarchal domination. That Bianca is punished for speaking up is amply demonstrated by her father’s suppression of hers. The novel comments indirectly on the socio-cultural realities of women’s lives in the nineteenth century India.

Some of Kamala Markandaya’s novels have notes of resistance. Rukmini, the narrator-heroine in her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) resists the onslaughts of the industrialisation. Her *Some Inner Fury* (1957) is a tragedy engineered by politics, even as *Nectar in a Sieve* is a tragedy engineered by economics. *A Silence of Desire* (1961) invades the imponderable realm of spiritual realities. Sarojini offers silent resistance to male rationality and Western pragmatism by turning to faith healing.

In Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *The Householder* (1960), Indu is self-assertive. When her husband says, “I have forbidden you”, she flares up asking, “Who are you to forbid me?” and she snorts and stamps her feet. In *To Whom She Will* (1955) Tarla develops a passion for Ladies Committees to overcome the shortcomings of her marriage. For much the same reason Mrs. Kaul in *A Backward Place* (1965) gets engrossed in her Cultural Dais. Jhabvala’s women find the means of self-satisfaction and self-indulgence. They, including the heroine of *Get Ready for Battle* (1962) find solace through social welfare activities. Her novels focus not only on marriage negotiations but also on the trapped married couples who either wriggle within the cage for better understanding as in *The*
Householder and in A Backward Place (1965), or break loose to live their separate lives as in Get Ready for Battle.

A daughter of Vijaylakshmi Pandit, Nayantara Sahgal’s novels have the undertones of resistance. In her first novel A Time to be Happy (1957) neither does Maya revolt nor yields but sets about building another world which though not so satisfactory, is a kind enough substitute for married happiness. Amonaji refuses to be under the domination of husband. One can unmistakably notice her “stubborn refusal to submit to the mould in which he had tried to cast her” (Sahgal 35). While in A Time to be Happy Sahgal’s main concern is with self-expression within marriage, in This Time of Morning (1965) she widens her area of concern to the kind of freedom young women desire outside marriage. Uma Mitra in This Time of Morning defies convention boldly and outrageously. Saroj in Storm in Chandigarh (1969) is unhappy and unable to find a reciprocal involvement in her marriage. Within her marriage she wants equality, involvement and continuity. Saroj’s departure from Inder is a move towards personal freedom and a rejection of the role Inder had wanted to thrust on her. Simrit in The Day in Shadow (1971) is finally estranged by her husband Som’s growing obsession with power and possession. In almost every novel Nayantara Sahgal has a central woman-character who gradually moves towards an awareness of her emotional needs.

Resistance to the pre-independence politics and to patriarchal restrictions is presented in Dina Mehta’s And Some Take a Lover wherein the Indian Parsi angle is provided.

In Anita Desai’s Cry, the Peacock (1963) the heroine Maya tries to tell her story to herself, to discover some meaning in her life, and even to justify her self to herself. Resenting being sidetracked, Desai’s heroines exhibit anger, articulate their feelings and ultimately take their own decision that may not be termed healthy. Maya and Monisha commit suicide. Sita quits her home for a while, Nanda Kaul withdraws to the hills and Bim rebels but reconciles.

The trend of reconciliation with life not in a helpless abject manner but in self-revelatory moments is typical of Shashi Deshpande’s heroines too. She discusses the issues of women’s domestic life and their failure to live a meaningful life and finally, without erasing the self, she allows each of her heroines to draw on her inner vision to achieve freedom.

Indian women do not discuss their experiences in deference to social conventions. But Kamala Das seems to view these experiences as normal to have
been felt by women across time and space. Therefore she makes no attempt to hide the sensuality of the human form. Her autobiography *My Story* (1976) displays her rage and rebellion. She growls at the tradition-bound conservative society which was always harsh on her unconventional life style. Her confessional tone underlines the critique of social institutions. She unleashes the suppressed world of women’s urges, frustrations and wild sexual fantasies. Her book provides the critique of the Indian marriage as patriarchal oppression.

When one comes to Shobha De, Namita Gokhale and others including Arundhati Roy one can discern the change in the scene. Their language is uninhibited. Their novels are marked by the Western concepts of the body. The central issue in their novels is the body and its gratification the significant concern. In *Paro* Namita Gokhale depicts the unrestrained manifestation of greed and selfish hunger for sex which is expressed by the liberated Paro. Shobha De in her *Socialite Evenings* redefines the new woman who is more open to experiences of sex without qualms, be it pre-marital or extra-marital. De presents an outrageous picture of perversions. Whatever it is, it certainly shows the march from silence to assertions, from speech to action. Not content with exploring the centrality of sexual desire in heterosexual relationships, some Indian women writers are turning to bold themes like lesbianism and other perversions. Shobha De’s *Strange Obsession*, Manju Kapoor’s *The Married Woman* and the works of Suniti Namjoshi deal with lesbian relationships.

The inflow of Diaspora writings also provides a variegated picture of resistance. A major body of fictions comes from Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee along with Randhwa, Shona Ramaya, Jhumpa Lahiri and others. These diaspora writers are more exposed to influences and have more space to interact. Dimple in *Wife* by Bharati Mukherjee resists being hyphenated Americans. Jasmine in *Jasmine* resists her native culture at every step and with every bold assertion. Divakaruni, Randhwa and many others offer resistance to their otherisation as diaspora subjects. In the host country they, being the Indians, are the “other”.

Many Muslim women presented the Muslim woman’s view of patriarchal domination. As early as 1905 Begum Rokeya Sakhawat voiced her resentment against the restrictions imposed on women by the traditional Muslim society. Sakhawat’s forceful *Sultana’s Dream* (1905) was originally written in English and later translated into Bengali by Rokeya herself. She shows the complete reversal of the reality. The work depicts a rebellious consciousness. She articulated the need for change. *Sultana’s Dream* describes
life in an imaginary country - “Lady land”, where women are the rulers. They are brainy, free to move about and to command. Men, on the contrary, are the subordinates, meant to be inside their Mardana - male quarters as opposed to the Zenana - female quarters. This work was much ahead of its time. She evoked bitter criticism and opposition for denouncing Purdah and condemning men. This book shows her undaunted spirit and the shock wave it generated. Iqbalunnisa Hussain, a social novelist wrote only one novel *Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household* (1944) where she has resisted the suppression of women in Muslim society in India through the two orthodox customs which give the book its name. She pours her anger against the custom of polygamy in Muslim society, the indifference of the Muslims to the happiness of women and the harm which the purdah system can do to women. The novelist makes a pointed attack on the society so that a better and happier society may evolve. Attia Hosain’s collection of short stories *Phoenix Fled* (1953) presents bold women characters. Her only novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) provides a Muslim woman’s resistance to the constricted space within the inner quarters. The novel is set against the backdrop of freedom struggle and ends with the partition of the country.

Women expressed their resistance through their poems too. Their new stringent tone is completely different from that of Sarojini Naidu and her immediate successors. The earlier enthusiasm is done away with and replaced by a dire need to face the world on their own terms. The mindset of women is formed by stark reality staring at their face. The outcome is poetry of anger and not of easy acceptance, poetry of resistance and not of celebration. Gauri Deshpande underlines this dramatic shift in her poem *The Eclipse*.

Sunita Jain in her *Man of My Desire* resists the reproaches, the charges of betrayal, let-down and exploitation by her ordained tormentor. She blames her mother in her poem titled *Mother* for everything that has gone wrong with her. In *Felled Joy* she demands unlimited power verging on the dangerous. Mamta Kalia’s *Poems 78* is yet another feminine voice set to poetic discipline and diction for expressing the theme of the feminine lot. It is a more robust voice. Kamala Das goes further and asserts her right to resist. Her poem *An Introduction* tells how the men-folk demand women to be in their stereotypical roles and when she tried to fit in, the consequence was the complete loss of her self. She decides to leave the protection of married life behind in her poem *I Shall Some Day*.

In the hands of Eunice de Souza irony becomes a potent mode of voicing resistance. She chides her father in her poem *Tribute to Papa*. She expresses how she
strongly wishes to sit in her office chair with her feet up in her poem *Compulsions*. This is not an impulsive reaction but a natural resistance against oppression. In Indian society being a baby girl is in itself a traditionally imposed shame and sin. Eunice de Souza devises her own way to square the matter in *De Souza Prabhu*. When her childish attempts fail, she wants to take revenge. In *Forgive Me, Mother* she has a dream-wish to finish her off. And in *Autobiographical* she has long killed her father. Such types of feelings are unknown to Indian society, but they express what a sensitive soul can do if suppressed for a longer time. In her *The Road* she passionately resists the demand of eternal sacrifice expected from a woman and woman alone.

The resistance poetry is at its most stringent in the youngest poet among the contemporary women - Shree Devi. Two of her important poems are *The Sky My Land* and *The Cremator Cremated*. In the poem *The Sky My Land* she takes an imaginative flight direct to the sun, leaving her home and hearth behind. Her fierce flight to the sun is similar to Sylvia Plath’s flight to the same destination in her famous poem *Ariel*. In *The Cremator Cremated* Shree Devi’s resistance becomes more macabre, her incipient anger against her lover gets vicarious satisfaction while she watches, almost gleefully, his burning on the funeral pyre. The details of each part of the body burning are violently vivid. All depictions apparently look unwomanly. Such type of resistance to man had already been written by Sylvia Plath in *Purdah* and *Lady Lazarus*. In the Indian context, it is something new and startling but should be taken quite seriously as a stern warning, pointing to the shape of the things to come.

It can seen that resistance to domination has not come so easily to an Indian woman writer subjugated and suppressed as she has been through many a century. Fed long on Sita-Savitri syndrome, her sacrifice has always been glorified in socio-cultural ethos of India. There has always been a big gap between her projection in religious literature and her predicament in real life. Earlier because of lack of exposure to the outside world, she did not vent forth her wrath. But in the last few decades, the process of liberal education and employment opportunities has given her enough confidence to articulate her anger and resistance to the age-old injustice, inequality and oppression heaped on her. The ideological morale booster has come from the rise of feminisms in the western world during the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century leaving a profound impact on Indian womanhood too.

However it would be preposterous to insist that women’s literature in totality has resistance or dissent embedded in it. The self-effacing and self-sacrificing females still
populate the pages. Woman's power of patient endurance, her inexhaustible capacity for love, her simple tenderness are still visible in many of their writings but there are also the self-questioning women protagonists struggling to locate their autonomous self by asserting their individuality and rejecting male domination.

But a question is being raised - is resistance detrimental to literature? C. D. Narasimhaiah is of the opinion that it "... curtails the choice, inhibits exploration of alternatives, blocks the channels of feeling and its very language narrows the area of the thinkable" (Narasimhaiah 240). But when the torture is extreme and unbearable, a one-point focus becomes inevitable, even essential to harmonise social equilibrium. The concept of women's resistance stands on the argument that women are badly treated by the society which is male dominated and that women must speak out to get heard and also defy in order to get visibility. Resistance challenges the centres of power. It may not transform or overthrow power in a sudden overturn, but it has the possibility to weaken the oppressive structure and empower the resistant subject. Through resistance literature women-empowerment can become a possibility. For that violations must be made public by speaking up, by writing or by organised activities. Resistance as a socio-cultural practice has been largely successful. The example being Gandhiji's philosophy of passive resistance and also many other resistance struggles in many Third World countries. As an ideology, resistance gives creative writers the tool to present the picture of the social transformations and the cultural implications of those transformations.

In reading resistance in the plays, one can not measure the transformative value of a piece of writing, but its pragmatic approach does show the corresponding changes in socio-cultural patterns and their validity as the sites of change in it.
References


