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Understanding Women's English Writings as a Paradigm of Resistance

By Mudassir Ali Shah¹ and Humaira Riaz²

Abstract

Women face numerous political, economic, cultural, and religious barriers in the world. To remove the barriers, fight for survival, and pave their way for development, women show resistance in politics, legislation, literature, theatre, songs, marches, art, sports, movies, and seminars. The previous studies have explored patriarchy as the best reason for women's resistance to fight against male-domination, ideological divisions, policies, traditions and cultures, and religion to claim their individual identity and equality. The present study demonstrates the role of literature in awakening society and explores how writing helps in resistance and maintains the struggle of liberation for the vulnerable section of the society. It uses textual analysis to explore resistance in the writing of women from Pakistan, England, and Ireland - namely Bernardine Evaristo, Marian Keyes, and Uzma Aslam Khan. It considers English language fiction narratives as a writing tool and a 'paradigm of resistance' to society, religion, politics, patriarchy, and class. The study contributes to the emancipation of women in patriarchal societies by resisting the forces, which work to suppress women. Women's writings are strong tools of survival and resistance in male-dominant societies. Women must write in different languages to voice against injustice, inequality, and violence in the world.

Keywords: Women Writings, Resistance, Violence, Injustice, Third-wave Feminism

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Introduction

Women across the globe are caught in a cobweb of cultural, political, economic, and religious shackles. In today's time, there is a need to rescue them from this unparalleled brutality and to strive for their successful living to create free conditions for them to pursue their own paths. To break the barriers, women articulate their resistance to the existing dominant structures through political advocacy, activism, writing, theater, melodies, workmanship, sports, films, and classes. However, the fundamental motivation for women's resistance against male-domination, or patriarchal traditions, laws, and religious practices is to claim their individual identity and fight against the disparities in the society. In France, Muslim women resisted the veil policy through gatherings which served as an act of resistance against western hegemony, and, more specifically, a western definition of women's rights and freedom. Similarly, in other parts of the world, women from Palestine, Kashmir, India, Western Sahara, and Syria have fought for their rights. Furthermore, resistance from women is triggered by her situation, mostly affected by gender, class, employment, and issues of poverty (Read, 2007).

Literature helps in awakening a society. Writers and leaders have used literature to shake their readers and followers against inequality and injustice in societies and literature for many years was utilized against the menace of racism and intolerance. The questions Harper Lee raised in her novel *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (1960) about race were iconic and continue to resonate even today in the 'Black Lives Matter' movement in the United States of America. In the same manner, Bernardine Evaristo, Marian Keyes and Uzma Aslam Khan, contemporary women writers contributed to English language literature portraying resistance by voicing issues women face in the late 20th and early 21st century.

American literature for many years provided support through writing to spread awareness against the menace of in justice and intolerance. For example, Harper Lee contributed to the cause of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement in the United States of America through her work by highlighting the inequality and injustice in the society. As a whole, literature serves as a tool to show resistance and struggle of liberation. Resistance through literature calls the attention 'towards racial and social repression' ("Brazilian literature - Redemocratization", 2020). The three selected novels depict the lives of female characters who spend their lives in different contexts (geographical location and culture), however in similar circumstances. The narratives focus on the social life of each female character. Novels are instrumental as 'paradigm of resistance' to society, religion, politics, patriarchy, and class system. The narratives reflect writers' attempts to "liberate" women from conventional, and more specifically male-dictated, values and beliefs. Fiction empowers women to discover their unique individual identity (Waugh, 2006). Construction of resistance through fiction empowers, emancipates, and makes 'allowances for the imaginative reconfiguration' of the relationship between individual and society (Corbella, 2006, p. 116).

Uzma Aslam Khan, a Pakistani writer who owns five novels to her name i.e., *Trespassing* (2003), *The Geometry of God* (2008), *Thinner Than Skin* (2012) and *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali* (2019). The narrative in *Trespassing* by Uzma Aslam Khan is set in the 1990s in the context of the Afghan and Gulf War. The book is defined as prescient for its portrayal of the dark and troubled context of the involvement of the West in the East, and it is considered a precursor to post-9/11 fiction by a Pakistani writer. Bernardine Evaristo, born to an English mother and Nigerian father, was educated at Eltham Hill Girls' Grammar School, the Rose Bruford College, and Goldsmiths, University of London, where she earned her PhD in Creative Writing. Marian Keyes, an Irish writer, is best known for her work in women's literature, namely *Watermelon* (2005) and *Lucy Sullivan is Getting Married* (2007).

The present study explores how resistance as a strategy of survival in these narratives highlight and voice women's struggle in the backdrop of their specific cultures and how constructing resistance in fiction empowers and emancipates the relation between individuals and society. Women writing as a 'paradigm of resistance' in the context of religion, society, class system, patriarchy, and political bodies urges women to voice and resist the forces dominating them for ages. In 1991, in response to the infamous U.S. Supreme Court justice nomination hearings during which nominee Clarence Thomas was accused by his former staff member Anita Hill of sexual harassment, Rebecca Walker encouraged young feminists in her article to *Ms. Magazine* (1992) to take charge in their feminist activism by stating that:

"Let Thomas's confirmation serve to remind you, as it did me, that the fight is far from over. Let this dismissal of a woman's experience move you to anger. Turn that outrage into political power" (Walker, 1992).

She boldly asserted, "I am not a postfeminist feminist. I am the Third Wave," and it began the era of the Third Wave of Feminism (Walker, 1992). An observation of the history of feminism reveals that postmodern feminist theory questions and rejects traditional essentialist practices (Wolff, 2007).

Feminist struggle in its third wave (1990) offered women the opportunity to lead and display their leadership skills, the ability to re-establish "self" as the subject (Drake, Findlen & Walker, 1997) and a platform to resist the male dominancy. The third wave (1990) holds a significant role in contemporary feminism (Burkett and Brunell, 2019). It addresses different social contexts, and the particular set of challenges women face (Synder, 2008, p.178). It dedicates support to those individuals and groups who work towards racial, gender, economic, and social justice (Burkett and Brunell, 2019).

Conduit (1988) explored the purpose of feminist criticism as "shar[ing] the goal of eradicating the oppression of women through increased understanding of the conditions of women's lives (Conduit, 1988, p.7)." Feminist criticism is recognized as a medium to understand the different channels including text, media, and the spoken word (Hart, 1997). Women writers emerge as not only speakers, but they also take lead in challenging stereotypical identities in society.

Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) portrays the lives of twelve very different people in Britain, who are predominantly female and black. The novel deals with the themes of freedom and writing of women as a 'paradigm of resistance'. Keyes's *This Charming Man* (2008) is about four different women and one charming man. It covers the issues of physical, sexual, and mental abuse along with obsession and addiction. It also reflects life-threatening violence against women and covers artistically the theme of domestic abuse (Married and Keyes, 2007). Khan in *Trespassing* (2005) touches the chords of various complex issues relating to Pakistani society, religion, and economy. The novel also provides an insight to the reader on the narrative of the novel as it has displayed a few strong female characters who try to go against the tides of society (Khan, 2019).

Paradigm of Resistance

Literature reflecting struggle and resistance by women writers has focused on giving an identity to the individuality of women in the society as "during the 1920s and 1930s, common women challenged conventional notions of womanhood in a variety of ways, from adopting new norms about sexuality (e.g., short hairstyles) to developing new perspectives on their relationship to wage labour" (Nicholson, 2010). With the passage of time, an extensive amount of literature from women has showed that the fight of feminists aims to devise means

and mechanisms through which to suppress men “as a class, not through genocidal, but a political struggle” (Clarke, 1981). According to feminists, when men disappear as a class, women will disappear as a class as well from the arena of society, because “there are no slaves without masters.” (Clarke, 1981).

Resistance is the essence to survival in the dynamics of the world when individuals face atrocity, injustice, and inequality. The mechanism of resistance can vary in different conditions and can sometimes appear in the form of violence. *Trespassing* (2005) by Khan is set in the era of 1990s during the aftermath of the War in Afghanistan and Gulf War and completed a few months before the events of 9/11. The book is applauded as prescient, as it portrays the dark and troubled context of the involvement of the Western countries in the Eastern belt. It is considered a precursor to post-9/11 fiction from Pakistan as a novel in the genres of literature. The narrative highlights complex values like gender discrimination in Pakistan, issues of women in rigid patriarchal society, rights of women, bargain with patriarchy, and honour killing that are related to society, religion, and economy of Pakistan. The novel also offers the reader a frigid perspective on the attitudes of Americans during the first Gulf War. It illuminates the role of female characters against the tides of society through the characters Riffat and Dia (Khan, 2019).

Women’s struggle against patriarchy, religion, and society has a long history, and resistance from women arise in different forms. The conventional mindset on women’s role in society received its initial blow from Simone de Beauvoir who resisted the notion of “eternal feminine” in *The Second Sex* (1949). The concept of feminism gained widespread acceptance as a credence for the provision of equality in society, politics, and economic affairs to all individuals irrespective of their gender identity. The movement mainly originated in the West, but it was manifested worldwide by all institutions who were committed to the equal rights of women (Brunell & Burkett, 2020). Feminism emerged as a movement to resist injustice, inequality, and violence which patriarchy imposed upon woman for centuries. Simone de Beauvoir changed feminist thinking for the coming generations through her sentence, ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’ in her book, *The Second Sex* in 1949.

Posing a question ‘What is a woman?’ triggered women around the world to consider their roles (Waugh, 2018), which led to resistance against practices undermining women in social structures and provided an edge to the superiority of men in society. Resistance basically denies the practices of inequality, brutality and injustice of patriarchy, and cultural impositions which distributes the power dynamics among genders in an imbalanced manner. Resistance can also be against the hatred of the social construction of gender and is used to move the political, cultural, and religious boundaries imposed on woman to control them.

De Beauvoir resisted the myth of “eternal feminine” (1949). Her thought “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” compelled women to consider their existence. De Beauvoir (1949) denied the existence of ‘feminine nature’ and argued against the alleged inferiority of women to men in terms of psychology and physical appearance as woman across different cultures (Waugh, 2006). Over a period, feminism has emerged as a discourse of different related ideas such as emancipation, struggle, resistance, and transformation.

Trespassing (2005) portrays a vivid picture of modern Pakistani society in the 1990s. The narrative opens by a dedication advocating feminist thought ‘To look is an act of choice.’ The novel depicts the struggle for women’s right of choice through the character of Riffat in the novel. Traditional Pakistani society considers marriage in which a woman marries an individual of her choice sacrilegious. However,

The text refutes the notion that marriage should be performed as an obligation and duty for family and society due to cultural pressures.

'Take marriage, for instance. They [parents] wanted it to remain a union that suited them, not the couple. She told Dia the worst thing she could do was listen to that, and perhaps was the only mother in the country to repeatedly warn her to marry only out of love, not obligation' (Khan, 2003: p. 13)

Through fiction, writers deliver a message to society and orthodox mindsets warning them against disparity against women in the name of honor and religion. The struggle of women through feminism against the concentric structure of power comprising state/colonial, patriarchal, and representational hegemonic discourses through marches, literature, seminars, movements, and conference has a record of long history (Cheurfa, 2019). Literature helps reflect society and societal values (Scholarworks.uni.edu, 2019). Feminism through literature has resisted discourse which undermines the position of woman in the society. Women writers adopted different genres of literature to address gender issues, make the status of women visible, and defend it in different national contexts around the world.

The narrative highlights the caprice 'Somewhere in the world, the sun is just waking up' (Khan, 2003: p. 21) A growing body of literature recognizes the importance of women's resistance against inequality and creates awareness against the ferociousness of patriarchy against women since time immemorial. Feminist literary criticism played an important role during the second wave of feminism against gender discrimination, wage discrimination, and domestic violence. Feminists held a strong belief that literature has the power to create ideas which may support the cause of feminism and that it would also provide meaningful support in resisting and perpetuating the strong belief system prevalent in the society.

In feminist literature, Virginia Woolf's '*A Room of One's Own* (1929) emerged as a powerful essay related to the social and economic restrictions imposed over women (Waugh, 2006). In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf blamed women's absence from history not on their lack of brains and talent but on their poverty. She focused on women empowerment and argued that unequal opportunities for women negatively affect all of society. It was Woolf's haunting language, her prescient insights into wide-ranging historical, political, and feministic issues, and her revisionist experiments with novelist form during her writing career through which she managed to alter the course of Modernist and postmodernist writing. *A Room of One's Own* (1929) by Virginia Woolf was the harbinger of change and a strong resistance force in English literature challenging social and economic restriction; *Trespassing* follows the same ideals (Waugh, 2006). Around the world, kitchen is associated with women and constructed socially around women's central role as homemakers. The narrative targets this stereotypical gender construction: 'In Karachi, he'd only entered the kitchen to be fed' (Khan, 2003: p. 29). Khan uses woman as the mouthpiece to expose, resist, challenge, and undermine the cultural assumptions about gender (Waugh, 2006).

Trespassing (2005) illustrates the significance of choice in one's life, especially women. It sketches the resistance through words mirroring the void decision-making power of women in society. It reinvigorates the spirit of resistance in a woman by making one of the characters a leader as exemplified through the quote: "You always have a choice." She began stomping noisily about the room, doing he wasn't sure what. 'Today she wore a pink T-shirt that said Take Action' (Khan, 2003: p. 32). The narratives' dedication of few chapters to the word 'choice' is to emphasize the magnitude this word carries in an individual's life. The spark of revolt, mutiny, and resistance is experienced by the dominant forces of society in different eras and phases. As Foucault expresses in *The History of Sexuality* (1976), "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power." (Foucault, 1990) Therefore, in the West, women as a gender have struggled to eradicate the barriers of system and class that controlled them; however, contemporary Eastern women

suffer to date for they need to remove all the impediments necessary to excel in their society and improve their lives.

The female characters in *Trespassing* (2005) debate over the power that marriage can grant Pakistani women that:

‘You haven’t mentioned the ones whose marriages work,’ countered Nini. ‘Some women have more flexibility around their husbands than their fathers. Look at your mother. She blossomed after marrying a man she didn’t know and has been an inspiration to so many other women. Karachi’s becoming a city of entrepreneurial mothers. They get what they want. They just have to give in first. It’s simple mechanics.

Dia turned away. Yes, her mother had thrived, and yet her warning echoed in the grove. Marry out of love. Not obligation. (Khan, 2003: p. 114).

The institution of marriage is built on honor of love and, hence, is mere an obligation. Similarly, Elif Shafak, a Turkish female writer voices her power through fiction to advocate woman empowerment and give priority to woman’s intellectual voice for emancipation and empowerment (Maughan, 2020). Shafak (2008) regards resistance as the key to life in her book *The Bastards of Istanbul* (Shafak, 2008). According to Shafak, patriarchy can be encountered through the solidarity and unity of women in different societies as the divided woman offers an advantage to patriarchy to be more aggressive against a woman in terms of violence. Writing is a means to counter inequality, injustice, violence, and brutality against women.

The character, Riffat, shows the struggle of a woman against patriarchy, religion, and society. Literature has a meaningful purpose, and it is to represent an important arena of struggle for those who seek freedom from oppression (Harlow, 1987). *Trespassing* (2005) reflects it as follows:

When her husband died, Riffat’s in-laws had taken over management of the factory, but she hadn’t let them take over her farm. She hadn’t listened when they said she needed to spend more time with the newly orphaned children. She hadn’t changed her routine. Her brother-in-law, whether out of kindness or malice, urged the family to let her be. ‘She will have fans but no friends,’ he declared. He’d been right. That was the price a proud woman had to pay (Khan, 2003, p. 199).

The narrative explicitly favors a woman who follows her desires e.g., a mother character who guarantees unconditional support to her daughter in her choices:

‘Calm down, darling. You’re young. You’ve no idea how hostile society gets if you challenge it.’ ‘I’ve some idea – through you.’

A fleeting sorrow shot through Riffat’s eyes but faded quickly. ‘True again, though that’s still not enough of an idea. For your sake, I hope it never is. Anyway,’ she added with a smile, ‘I’m always on your side, whatever you choose. And whatever others say about it’ (Khan, 2003, p. 201).

Riffat pledges to stand by her daughter whatever she chooses, which reflects her resistance to society, orthodoxy, and patriarchy, which deny women their right to choose. A large number of available literatures on feminism suggests that the feminists are of the view that “women are kept, maintained, and contained through terror, violence, and a spray of semen” (Clarke, 1981, p.130). Feminism through literature has resisted the discourses which undermine the position of women in society. Women writers adopted different genres of literature to address gender issues, make the status of women visible, and defend it in different contexts in various regions of the world. The feminist studies questioned and resisted the hierarchal relations, the interplay between superiority and inferiority, exclusion and inclusion, tension and relief, different forms

of aggression, the hegemony of male, patriarchy, and socially constructed roles of gender (Cheurfa, 2019).

Moreover, Ghanim (2017) explored Arab female writers like Fatima Mernissi, Leila Ahmad, and Saba Mahmoud who resisted against the established systems of power which are affecting the status of women in the Muslim world. In the same manner, Azra Nafisi emerged as an embodiment of resilience and resistance during the Iranian totalitarian regime after the arrival of Khamenei from France to boost further the Iranian revolution. Cobe (2019) explores Nafisi's book '*Reading Lolita in Tehran (2003)*,' which is a clear manifestation of resistance through literature as she provided first-hand incidents to the world about the happenings in Iran during the Islamic revolution. The text also criticizes the rituals and conventions barring women from their rights. It refuses repetition of set standards for a human being as one of the character expresses that: 'You've always told me not to blindly go with things. That too many people let others decide their future,' (Khan, 2003: p. 203).

The narrative resists the notion that parents, and elders should decide a woman's fate in a family. It targets the policies of the state as well, which plays an important role in conditioning the mindset of a society and provides impetus to the unseen power of patriarchy still prevalent in Asian societies. The purpose of resistance from women is to remove the imaginary formation of women because "woman is the product of a social relationship", and for them "Woman" is there to confuse us, to hide the reality "women" (Clarke, 1981). The book portrays the gameplay of the state through a character that:

'everyone in this country is a lapdog of someone who isn't from here.'

'You're a lapdog too.'

'I'm the lapdog of someone who represents my land. You can either be faithful, or you can be a traitor. There is no other way' (Khan, 2003: p. 375).

It further reiterates that those who resist against the policies of the state are labeled as trespassers by clergies, institutions, and media: 'Trespassers will be prosecuted.' (Khan, 2003: p. 390).

The narrative also highlights the lack of representation of women in public forums and resists the idea that men occupy key positions, who then prevent women from addressing their issues. It shows that women resist through their class consciousness because "consciousness of oppression is not only a reaction to (fight against) oppression," but it also helps in curbing the practices of oppression in society (Clarke, 1981).

'Below, placards flew: Let the people choose! A speaker waved his fist, packing her with courage, 'Until we own our own resources, we'll never be free.' All the speakers were men (Khan, 2003: p. 420).

In 1987, through *Resistance Literature* (1987), Harlow came up with the assertion that the purpose of literature is to represent an important 'arena of struggle' (Harlow, 1987) for all those individuals who strive for freedom and liberation through armed fighting from the oppressive nature of colonialism (Hurt, 2020). Harlow, while focusing on the freedom endeavours of nations, asserts that it is important in literary work to take into considerations the political, historical, and social conditions in which the literature is produced: "Resistance narratives, embedded as they are in the historical and material conditions of their production and given furthermore the allegiances and active participation of their authors, often on the front lines, in the political events of their country, testify to the nature of the struggle for

liberation as it is enacted behind the dissembling statistics of western media coverage and official government reports” (Harlow, 1987, p. 98). In the same context, the present study highlights the importance of women writing as a form of resistance with a critical feministic perspective.

The narrative challenges the idea of family in the local household in Pakistan considered as a strong pillar of patriarchy:

Home meant a mother-in-law working her from dawn till midnight, a belligerent husband who sometimes beat her, three other children, countless neighbors pouring in for gossip and meals bought with her money, an open sewer outside the kitchen, and absolutely nowhere for her to sit quietly for two minutes and sip her very own a cup of tea. If she tried, the other women would snap, ‘We never had such luxuries at your age (Khan, 2003: p. 427).

It resists patriarchy, religion, and social codes prevalent in Pakistani society. The text depicts strong resistance and voices concern for the emancipation of women in Pakistani society as a free soul.

Resistance in Evaristo’s *Girl, Woman, Other*

Resistance in Evaristo’s *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) shares the lives of twelve very different people in Britain, who are predominantly female and black. The female characters fall on a wide spectrum of generations, cultural backgrounds, sexualities, classes, and occupations. The stories, narrated by the characters themselves, cover the women’s families, friends, and lovers throughout their lives (Evaristo, 2019). The novel deals with the themes of freedom and writing of women as a ‘paradigm of resistance’. The characters in the novel display hatred against society, religion, and patriarchy, and it echoes the feminist ideas of Walker (1992):

‘To be a feminist is to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fibre of my life. It is to search for personal clarity in the midst of systematic destruction, to join in sisterhood with women when often we are divided, to understand power structures with the intention of challenging them’ (Walker, 2020). As an act of resistance, the lesbian women are of the opinion that they have already spent enough time hating each other and it is now time to love themselves. For the feminists advocating lesbian rights, “for all lesbians, as lovers, as comrades, as freedom fighters, is the final resistance” (Clarke, 1981). Clarke has further elaborated that ‘lesbianism’ is an act of resistance for a woman when she has to live in a male-supremacist, capitalist, racist, misogynist, homophobic, and imperialist culture. ‘Lesbianism’ is the tendency of a female to be emotionally and sexually attracted to other females.

In the early 19th century and the 20th century, lesbians denied or kept the orientation of being lesbian hidden due to backlash from family and society, but this began to change in the start of 21st century. Numerous jurisdictions in Europe, South and North America adopted laws or constitutional provisions to the establish the legality of same-sex marriage due to which the lesbians did not hide or deny their sexual orientation from the families and society (Duignan, 2020) because societally, things changed before they did legally. This resistance is vividly in the latest writing of Evaristo, which depicts the lives of twelve different girls and women who developed hatred against society, religion, and patriarchy. Two characters, Dominique and Nzinga, are in love with one another other, promoting the idea of a gender-free society in the world. They start living in a town where there are no men. The narrative idealizes a society without man:

Nzinga was a teetotal, vegan, non-smoking, radical feminist separatist lesbian house builder, living and working on wimmin's land all over America before moving on, a gypsy house builder Dominique was a drinking, drug-dabbling, chain-smoking lesbian feminist carnivorous clubber who produced theatre by women and lived in a London flat she soon became a teetotal, vegan, non-smoking, radical feminist lesbian house builder on wimmin's land called Spirit Moon, which only allowed lesbians to reside there (Evaristo, 2019, p. 84-85).

Feminism and lesbianism emerged as an ideology of power and being women-centred (Clarke, 1981). The ideology of power and women-centric approach is clearly reflected in the *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019):

the women who lived in the community came from every profession, as well as former housewives, they were craftswomen, chefs, teachers, farmers, shopkeepers, musicians, many were retired Dominique was curious to know more Gaia told her she'd been through the wars for social and legislative acceptance in the fifties and sixties, eventually deciding to turn her back on men, she was done with the patriarchy (Evaristo, 2019; p. 88).

The gender regime played an important role in different countries in relation to state regulations and workplace organizations due to the demands and resistance from feminists across the globe. In theory, gender regime refers to the state of play of gender relations in a given institution, and "the gender order is the relationship between different gender regimes or "the current state of play in the macro-politics of gender" (Bishop, 2020). Furthermore, it was through "the transition in the gender regime which provided political opportunities within the state and formal electoral politics by facilitating the mainstream feminist demands (Walby, 2002). The narrative resists the idea of gender by going against the existence of men that:

'did she miss men? never, the women of Spirit Moon try to live in harmony, even when arguments break out, we have a talking circle and try to sort it out, women can also choose to live hundreds of acres apart until things cool down, a feud might take years to heal, in time there's forgiveness, even if scars remain' (Evaristo, 2019; p. 88).

The book describes a town where women are not allowed to have a relationship with men. It shows women's resistance and refusal to live with men. The narrator narrates that 'if a woman goes straight and wants relationships with men, she has to leave, if she's celibate, she can stay, once we had a woman who turned and was caught sneaking men on to the property at night she had to go' (Evaristo, 2019; p. 88). The narrative provides a concept of a feminine society without men living inside it. The narrator shows the reader that:

'there's no need to be breaking balls here, Dominique (what a pretty name you have), because there are no men here, which is why we come across as serene to you, we can just be ourselves, reclaiming the Feminine Divine, connecting to and protecting Mother Earth, sharing our resources, making decisions communally but maintaining our privacy and autonomy, self-healing the female body and psyche with yoga, martial arts, walking, running, meditation, spiritual practice whatever works for each one of us (Evaristo, 2019, p. 89).

The book claims that 'women were much happier without men' (Evaristo, 2019; p. 92). It invokes the spirit of consistency and struggle of woman to achieve their dreams that:

‘firstly – do you think Oprah Winfrey (VIP) would have become the Queen of Television worldwide if she had not risen above the setbacks of her early life? secondly – do you think Diane Abbott (VIP) would have become Britain’s first black woman MP if she did not believe it was her right to enter politics and represent her community? (Evaristo, 2019, p. 133).

The character Dominique targets the ritual and religious practices which are against the spirit of feminism and lead to physical abuse for women. She expresses that ‘Nzinga plonked herself down in ‘the space she’d created’, was wearing a towel, still dripping wet, launched into a speech about all men ultimately being complicit in a patriarchal system that enabled female genital mutilation and seeing as women’s genitalia are being butchered all over the globe in the name of culture or religion or whatever, why not do the same to men who perpetrate most of the world’s sexual violence?’ (Evaristo, 2019, p. 103). The novel poses questions about the social construction of gender in society and the narrative provides a glimpse of the ideas:

gotcha, so here goes: women are designed to have babies, not to play with dolls, and why shouldn’t women sit with their legs wide open (if they’re wearing trousers, obv) and what does mannish or manly mean anyway? (Evaristo, 2019; p. 321).

Women resist removing the imaginary formation of female as gender because a woman is a product from a social relationship and for patriarchy and society, ‘Woman’ is there to confuse and hide the actual status of women. The novel targets gender construction and considers it as one of the great lies of the world and civilization as the narrator says, ‘gender is one of the biggest lies of our civilization it’s to keep men and women in their place, she shouted out to the landscape, as if evangelizing from a pulpit’ (Evaristo, 2019, p. 327).

The narrative questions the social construction that dolls are only for females and the reason that sitting postures with legs wide open are considered abominable for women. Similarly, ‘trans-inspired’ narratives used the power of pen and words in the form of memoirs and theories to resist the inequality imposed by patriarchy, religion, and society through gender-specific narratives, specifically *Redefining Realness* (2014) by Janet Mock. In relation to the trans-literature, Janet Mock served the transgender community through her skills of journalism and supported the cause of trans people, especially people of colour, for their rights in the health sector. Janet also worked for different communities and cultures for their survival once she revealed her identity as transsexual in an article for *Marie Claire* (Jacques, 2014).

Contemporary women refuse to believe in the sanctity of marriage belonging only to heterosexual relationships/couples. They consider it only as a natural way to satisfy their sexual needs. The narrative here juxtaposes heterosexuality and advocates for gender-free world that allows both sexes to live their lives according to their whims and sexual preferences. The text identifies barriers that do not allow a gender-free society.

Resistance in Keyes’s *This Charming Man*

Marian Keyes emerged in the arena of fiction in the 1990’s with the watermark of a feminist perspective in her work. The novel, *This Charming Man* (2008), by Marian Keyes is about four different women and one charming man. It covers physical abuse, sexual discrimination and harassment, workplace discrimination, mental abuse, motherhood, obsession, and addiction. It explains how individual and family lives are destroyed due to gender imbalance. The novel artistically illustrates violence against women (to the extent of life-threatening injuries) and covers the theme of domestic abuse (Married and Keyes, 2007).

The present section will examine a selection of texts through different theorists associated with the third wave of feminism such as Rebecca Walker and Judith Butler.

Around the world, females are associated with the powerless groups (Scott, 1989) in society and different writers have tried to highlight the various values, customs, and traditions that shape a woman's life in different circles. In the early English fiction of Pakistan, women were shown either as cogs in the wheels of the patriarchal system or as targets of various forms of oppression by patriarchy. In fiction, the writers by presenting the female characters within the context of their restrictions and dilemmas imply that there are traces of nascent resistance in the suppression of women. (Ijaz, 2019)

In her work, Keyes resist the set notion of motherhood in society, and her characters feel ashamed in exposing their thoughts that they are not ready to become a mother and may never be in the future. Grace Gildee in *This Charming Man* (2008) expresses that feminism has empowered women in achieving their rights and women have the option now to choose motherhood or not; however, global societies still expect women to bow down to the ritual of motherhood set by patriarchy, and refusal of this means that the woman will not be "doing" her gender "properly":

I didn't want children. And of all the shameful things a woman could admit to – breast enhancement, sex with her boyfriend's father – this was the most taboo. (Keyes, 2008, p.141- 142)

Similarly, she admits that her feelings to have children, however, she is never able to convince herself strongly enough of this desire and resists the norm of motherhood in society attributed to women:

Oddly – or maybe not, I didn't know – I had heartfelt sympathy for women who couldn't get pregnant, because I knew what it was like to be unable to control my own body. I wanted to want to get pregnant but never got it. (Keyes, 2008, p.142)

Keyes' resistance of the institution of marriage and motherhood also demonstrates through the characters that women possess individual desires and their individuality should be respected when she portrays it publicly. In *This Charming Man* (2008), Keyes exposes the double standards in the workplace through the character Grace Gildee. Keyes, along with resisting the double standards in her novel, has also used her texts to raise voice on the issues of sexual discrimination and harassment. Feminist theory has targeted sexual harassment in the workplace because when a woman moves from the arena of her home to the workplace, patriarchy has been observed to move from the private area to the public; whereas women were once confined to the home, it has been expressed that they now have 'the whole of society in which to roam and be exploited' (Walby, 1990, p.201), and it has never been this clearer than in the working world.

Women express their views about their jobs to have no choice but to 'endure sexual harassment to keep their jobs and learn to behave in a complaisantly and ingratiatingly heterosexual manner' (Rich, 1980, p.1769). It has become a norm in the workplace to allow or expect men to act in a certain way, and, in the same manner, a woman always faces criticism. Gildee in *This Charming Man* (2008) finds the title of 'Sugarfree' by her colleagues in the office because she possesses 'a reputation for being acerbic,' but she realizes that, if she were a man, she would 'simply have a reputation for being straight-talking' (Keyes, 2008, p.122).

Keyes in *This Charming Man* (2008) has resisted the institution of gender and has followed the footsteps of Butler to get rid of gender and remove any rules which are associated with a particular gender. Butler's *Gender Trouble* focuses on the rules, standards, requirements,

and functions of the society as to how individual in a society needs to naturally conform to them. Society punishes, ignores, and ridicules those who do not follow those rules, and, as Butler says, 'all social systems are vulnerable at their margins, and that all margins are accordingly considered dangerous' (Butler, 1999, p.168). Keyes touches the tender spots of society in relation to cross-dressing in *This Charming Man* (2008) through the character Noel. In society, a marginalised position has been assigned to cross-dressing; however, Keyes resisted the set norms and behaviours and adopted the social structure of cross-dressing, which is potentially dangerous. The following extract from *Gender Trouble* explains the problems often associated with drag/cross-dressing:

The notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities. Within feminist theory, such parodic identities have been understood to be either degrading to women, in the case of drag and cross-dressing, or an uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping from within the practice of heterosexuality, especially in the case of butch/femme lesbian identities. However, the relation between the 'imitation' and the 'original' is more complicated than that critique generally allows. (Butler, 1999, p.174-175).

Butler has advocated drag/cross-dressing to be accepted in societies around the world, but despite its positive effect, drag/cross-dressing is still in the arena of a marginalised and taboo position in society. Keyes, in her novel *This Charming Man* (2008), did not shy away from discussing it and has tried to resist society in keeping it marginalized and taboo in the society. The first chapter of *This Charming Man* (2008) features a sub-plot in which one of the protagonists, Lola, came across a group of secretive cross-dressers and their relationship turns into friendship. As a professional stylist, she helps them choose different clothing to openly express themselves. Later, Lola's residence becomes a type of "safe house" for the cross-dressers where they all are allowed to perform this other part of their gender without fear of ridicule. In the beginning, Lola being part of the same society, feels very uncomfortable in befriending these cross-dressers because they deviate from the set norms of society, but later, she feels even more uncomfortable in case she appears judgemental or politically incorrect:

'Cross-dressing, cross-dressing, I am sick telling you.'
 Didn't want him to change into dress. Wanted him to leave. But couldn't say that because feared he would think was judging him. But not judging him for being trannie. Simply didn't like him. (Keyes, 2008, p. 271-272)

Keyes, through Lola's character, conveys a message that it takes a certain amount of time to understand the cross-dressers being a real part of society. As time spent with these men passes, cross-dressing becomes less significant to Lola, and it merely becomes another facet of their personality.

Keyes, in *This Charming Man* (2008), has attempted to render cross-dressing an unexceptional condition and has resisted the notion that only certain types of men indulge in cross-dressing. Lola's character realises that there is no specific "type" of man who indulges in cross-dressing, and that even the most unlikely of men may partake in it:

Trannies gone. Thinking about evening's strange revelations, to wit: Rossa Considerine a trannie. You would NEVER think it to look at him. When he's a man, looks like he doesn't even comb his hair. (Keyes, 2008, p. 313)

This extract from *This Charming Man* (2008) is a very vivid example of Butler's hope for a fluid, changing gender performance in society. Keyes tries to show that individuals should be allowed to change their performance of gender per their desire and how individuals in the society do not have to strictly adhere to one fixed gender identity. It also demonstrates how

Keyes, in her work, resists the rigid roles of genders set by patriarchy in society. Moreover, women in society have attributed a certain irrational and unnecessary behaviour toward their own image, and the gender performance of the cross-dressers in *This Charming Man* helps to articulate that to women:

‘Oh! You are very bold! Will have another drink if you will join me.’ Wicked twinkle in his eye – so much blue eyeshadow! ‘Go on, Lola, one little drinky won’t kill you.’

Is this the way girls behave? Is this what he sees? (Keyes, 2008, p. 275)

The narrative refutes the idea of a weak woman who lives her life according to the set norms of society and supports patriarchy. Following this ideology, Noel dresses like a woman and joins a club where males dress like females every weekend. The narrative portrays the male character very artistically in female attire and shows resistance to the patriarchy and society by transforming the identity of the man to a woman. The novel expresses that ‘Fishnet tights, Tina Turner wig, badly applied make-up. His look quite trashy. All a little obvious. (Keyes, 2008, p. 210). The narrative resists the idea of a woman who supports her husband if he does not show his identity. The character Alicia Thornton finds out that her husband is gay, but she still supports him in saving the face of their marriage by spending one year with him in their marriage.

The novel highlights that ‘Thornton’s values are reminiscent of those of the 1950s, when women stuck by adulterous men, because ‘marriage is a sacred vow. Just because one person breaks the vow, it’s no reason for the other to do so.’ (Keyes, 2008, p. 191).

The book expresses ‘‘Da-dah!’ Proudly and shyly Noel emerged from kitchen, wearing short, stretchy, orange, and black leopard-skin dress, elbow-length leopard-skin evening gloves and – of course – the leopard-skin shoes. By the look of things, he likes leopard skin. (Have often found that redheads do.) Fishnet tights, Tina Turner wig, badly applied make-up. His look quite trashy. All a little obvious. Less is more, often find. But say nothing. He has his look, is working it’ (Keyes, 2008, p. 210).

Domestic violence imposed on women in the form of physical violence leads to emotional destruction. Keyes took the subject of domestic violence after much research and meeting with women who have experienced it first-hand (Nichols, 2008). Keyes shows to the world through her writing that domestic violence is not just the issue of women living in poverty, but it also targets the wealthy and those who have access to the power corridors. The novel portrays its male character as a sadist who beats, rapes, and mutilates the woman in his life. The novel reflects Lewis’s quote ‘What! You too? I thought I was the only one’ (Keyes, 2008). The narrative reiterates that violence is not limited to an individual in society only but has become a matter of every household. It is probably the economic deprivation or fulfilments, which cause horrific incidents of domestic violence. The text also criticizes hypocritical attitude of man who imposes domestic abuse on women ‘He broke down into proper shoulder-jerking crying. ‘What kind of animal am I?’ he moaned (Keyes, 2008: p. 77).’

The narrative is a clear manifestation of the behavior of male members of society inflicting violence on women. Violence led Arab feminists to raise their voices for women empowerment and rights, to arrange seminars and conferences for gender-related vocabulary, sexual assault, and related issues common within the Arab world. One episode of abuse leads to another episode of domestic abuse leaving women emotionally and physically distressed. Lola faces challenges in her job, and she moves to another town in order to get rid of the emotional trauma. Similarly, it costs Marine her marriage and loss of custody of her children, which slowly drives her to alcoholism. She also faces a backlash in her workplace due to decreased concentration in her work. The novel identifies the after-effects of domestic violence

and resists a society devoid of normal behavior towards women. 'Domestic violence is no joke' (Keyes, 2008, p. 83). Domestic violence is described as follow:

The grunts got louder, the thrusts became more like stabs, then he was shuddering and groaning. He went slack, draping his body over hers, so that her face was buried in his chest. She could barely breathe. (Keyes, 2008: p. 131).

The intensity of domestic violence is experienced by Marnie who repeatedly says”:

On the in breath, 'I'm.' On the out breath, 'Dying...'

I'm dying. (Keyes, 2008: p. 133).

The idea of a woman supporting her husband to give herself identity prevails in the narrative. Alicia Thornton discovers that her husband is gay but remains with him for one year to save face. The author explains that:

'Thornton's values are reminiscent of those of the 1950s, when women stuck by adulterous men, because 'marriage is a sacred vow. Just because one person breaks the vow, it's no reason for the other to do so.' (Keyes, 2008: p. 191).

The author also touches on the issue of abortion in her novel and raises awareness about non-consensual sex as one character experiences, 'Please stop, please. I could get an infection. I can't have sex for three weeks' (Keyes, 2008: p. 285). Domestic violence incidents in the novel show Paddy de Courcy's brutality toward his wife. Cigarette burns are acute forms of domestic violence which women throughout the world face. The narrative resists this form of violence implies that these burns not only leave a physical mark but also make the abused emotionally anguished 'She heard her own shriek and was on her feet, tugging her hand from his, without knowing why.

A cigarette. He'd put his cigarette out on the palm of her hand. He'd gripped the hand so hard the bones had squeaked and ground his cigarette into the center of it.' (Keyes, 2008: p. 337).

Domestic violence causes mental illness leaving scars on body and mind. The narrative acts as a survival strategy for women to resist violence and highlight an important issue associated with women. The narrative has stressed the solidarity of women against their abusers in society. The narrator unites the four characters in the novel to show resistance to the male character who has abused all the women in different forms. The narrator uses words to persuade the readers that unity is the way forward to face the abuser with strong conviction and show an abuser his real face in the mirror. The narrative expresses through the character that 'A lone woman making accusations,' Grace said, standing in the middle of the room. 'You could dismiss her as a nutter. Two even. But three, you're getting into different territory. And when there're five, it's looking very bad for you. Especially when one of them is Hollywood's hottest new star' (Keyes, 2008, p. 511). The narrator's words resonate that 'The way he used to... hit you and stuff. I think he might have done it to other women too. If I can find some, would you be interested in coming with them? To put pressure on him?'

'Pressure?' Marnie heard herself ask. How very, very strange this was. Paddy de Courcy, after all this time. Putting 'pressure' on him?

'If he doesn't back off, you and the others will go to the papers with your stories.'

'The papers!'

'It probably won't come to that. The threat will be enough.'

'Oh. Okay.' She couldn't have her story in the press. '... But Grace, what on earth makes you think there are others?' (Keyes, 2008, p. 436).

Keyes' narrative resisted the role of women solely being child bearers, which patriarchy dictates to be their only integral role in society. The book also resists that 'It was Jacinta Kinsella, carrying one of her five Birkin bags. Her husband had bought her one every time she gave birth, and, to be honest, I'd rather carry my stuff in a plastic bag that smelt of curry, if that was the price (Keyes, 2008, p. 95).

Therefore, writing is a medium providing a non-violent platform to fight injustice, inequality, barbarism, and violence. Uzma Aslam Khan, Bernardine Evaristo, and Marian Keyes through their writing resisted patriarchal forces causing downfall to woman. Society, patriarchy, and institutionalization of religion form a triangle barring woman from empowerment. The three narratives plead the case for women in different societies, artistically stimulating resistance against the male-domination.

Concluding the Resistance

To conclude the discussion, fiction writing appears instrumental in fighting patriarchy, society, and religious institutions to raise awareness of the barbarism, violence, and inequality that women face. Literary contributions by women writers during dictatorial regimes, anarchies, and genocides provide an inspirational impetus to the modern woman to write and challenge traditions and customs imposed on them. Evaristo raised significant and urgent questions regarding women's lives and left it to the reader to answer them. Her narrative identified lesbianism as a powerful weapon to resist conventional gender imbalance. Khan idealized the working woman for losing fears that stemmed from dependency on men and rejected negotiation with the patriarchy to achieve her freedom and rights. Keyes highlighted domestic violence as the only dilemma for poor as well as economically sound women around the world. Setting, tone, and style of the selected texts vary from one another; however, the purpose is to oppose oppression and the implied message is to resist oppression in their own ways and confront the powerful in their context. The three novels claim women empowerment and emancipation. The study illustrates similar poor conditions catching women around the world in patriarchal hang-up. Genre of resistance literature sets standards to record resistance. Future study can be conducted to explore South Asian fiction representation of queer troubles abortion rights and inheritance rights denied to women in contemporary Asian societies despite of religious obligations.

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