

RESISTANCE LITERATURE WRITTEN BY WOMEN IN URDU

¹ DR. ANEELA SALEEM , ² DR. SHAGUFTA FIRDOUS , ³SONIA SALEEM,

¹Assistant Professor, Institute of Urdu Language and Literature, University of the Punjab Lahore.

²Assistant Professor, Government College for Women University Sialkot.

³ Lecturer, Institute of Urdu Language and Literature, University of the Punjab Lahore.

Abstract

Resistance literature has been a valuable mode of challenging oppression, colonialism, and patriarchy. It has given voice to the marginalized by retelling their own stories and realizing social change. This article explores the contributions of women writers such as Rasheed Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, and Fahmida Riaz in Urdu resistance literature, particularly in questioning patriarchal, social, and religious oppression.

Through their works, these writers critiqued domestic oppression, gender inequality, and societal hypocrisy while advocating for women's autonomy, education, and sexual freedom. Jahan's Angaaray exposed the suffocating conditions of women in conservative households, Chughtai's Lihaaf boldly addressed female sexuality, and Riaz's poetry, such as Chadar Aur Char Diwari, critiqued patriarchal control and societal repression. Their literature, deeply rooted in the Progressive Writers' Movement, not only reshaped Urdu literary traditions but also inspired feminist discourse and resistance movements in South Asia.

By addressing themes such as the critique of patriarchy and domestic oppression, gender and sexuality as forms of resistance, social and religious hypocrisy, and class struggles and economic oppression, their works remain relevant to contemporary feminist activism. Their enduring legacy continues to inspire new generations to challenge oppressive structures and advocate for equality.

Keywords: Resistance Literature, Urdu Women Writer, Feminist discourse, Patriarchy

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature has consistently portrayed the struggles and triumphs of societies, while also serving as a powerful means of opposing oppression, colonialism, and dictatorship. Resistance literature documents violent historical and political events, highlighting the experiences of those challenging authority. In its essence, resistance literature transcends the boundaries of artistic expression to engage directly with societal, political, and cultural struggles. As Barbara Harlow (1987) asserts, "Resistance literature is not just a reflection of struggle; it is an active participant in it, shaping the consciousness of its readers and inspiring them to fight for justice"². This insight underscores the deeply embedded role of resistance literature in cultural and historical movements. Furthermore, Harlow emphasizes that "Resistance poetry is part of the cultural institutions and historical existence of a people", highlighting how literature becomes inseparable from the social and political contexts it seeks to challenge"³. At the heart of resistance literature is its ability to inspire change and mobilize collective action. It not only recounts experiences of oppression but actively reshapes societal narratives, positioning marginalized voices at the center of their own stories. As Ender (2018) states, "Counter-narratives provide a space for marginalized voices to challenge dominant narratives and reshape the societal and historical contexts that have silenced them, empowering these voices to reclaim their narratives"⁴. This highlights that resistance literature serves as a deliberate intervention to counter dominant ideologies, particularly for marginalized groups often excluded from mainstream historical records. Thus, its significance lies not only in recounting struggles but also in its power to challenge societal structures from within, compelling readers to engage both emotionally and intellectually with the struggles it represents. In the tradition of resistance literature, women have played a vital role in using their writing to challenge patriarchal structures that marginalize their voices. Historically, women's contributions



to literature have been overshadowed by male-dominated narratives, yet women, particularly from marginalized communities, have consistently crafted their own counter-narratives. These works assert their agency, challenge hegemonic power, and offer fresh perspectives on social and political struggles. Feminists have advocated for the protection of women's rights, and social constraints have also emerged as a significant form of resistance in literature. In Urdu literature, women have been marginalized, with male voices largely shaping the literary landscape. However, the early 20th century brought a notable change as women began to assert their presence, aligning with larger social movements like the Indian independence struggle and the Progressive Writers' Movement. These movements offered women writers a platform to challenge societal norms, confront patriarchal control, and resist political oppression. Urdu women writers have made significant contributions not only to fiction but also to essays, poetry, and plays, using these forms as platforms for social critique and activism. By documenting their lived experiences of oppression, they challenge the societal forces that seek to silence them. Their works transcend literature, becoming acts of radical resistance that engage deeply with both personal and political struggles. This article examines the contributions of women writers, particularly Ismat Chughtai, Rasheed Jahan, and Fahmida Riaz, to Urdu resistance literature. It explores their unique perspectives within the social, political, and historical contexts they navigate, discussing the themes they tackle and the challenges they face. The article also reflects on how their writings challenge oppressive systems, reshape historical narratives, and contribute to social change. Furthermore, it considers the lasting impact and legacy of their work on both Urdu literature and global movements for justice and equality.

2. Key Writers and Their Resistance Literature

2.1 Rasheed Jahan (1905-1952)

Rasheed Jahan was a pioneering writer, doctor, and activist. Her writing has been characterized as "resistance literature," which challenged patriarchal norms and championed women's rights and education. Born into a liberal Muslim family in Aligarh, she was exposed to literary and reformist ideas during her childhood.⁵ Later, she contributed to the nationalist movement, the Progressive Writers' Association, and various social causes related to literacy and healthcare. Her works often emphasized the roles women play in society and drew connections between health and inequality. Today, her writings continue to influence discussions on gender and social justice.⁶

Rashid Jahan's most renowned work, *Angaaray* (1932), co-authored with fellow members of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA), is a groundbreaking collection of short stories that boldly critiques the patriarchal structures of Indian society. In the titular story, *Angaaray*, Jahan exposes the hypocrisy of societal norms with the powerful metaphor:

*"Society burns women at the stake of tradition, and then mourns their ashes. But who will light the fire of change?"*⁷

This line highlights the destructive impact of tradition on women's lives while calling for societal transformation.

In *Dilli ki Sair* (A Tour of Delhi), Jahan challenges the gendered division of space and freedom. Through her protagonist, a young woman, she questions,

*"Why is it that a man can roam freely, but a woman is confined to the four walls of her home? Is she not human too?"*⁸

In another passage, she criticizes the social norms that justify women's confinement under the garb of protection:

*"A man walks the streets as if he owns them, while a woman is told the world is too dangerous for her. But who made it dangerous? And for whom?"*⁹

These lines dismantle the patriarchal logic that confines women to domestic spaces, demanding equal freedom and opportunities.

Similarly, in *Ek Ghar Mein* (In a House), Jahan interrogates the traditional family structure and its oppressive impact on women. She writes,

*"The home is not a sanctuary; it is a prison for women. The walls may be decorated, but they are walls nonetheless."*¹⁰

This critique shows how even homes, which seem comfortable, can become places where women are controlled and confined. Through her clear and powerful writing, Rashid Jahan not only revealed the unfair treatment of women but also pushed for a complete change in how society sees them. Her work in *Angaaray* is a bold challenge to patriarchal rules and a strong call for change.

Rashid Jahan's work also critiques religious orthodoxy and its role in perpetuating social inequality. In *"Parde ke Peeche"* (Behind the Veil), she portrays the lives of Muslim women living under the strictures of purdah (veiling) and religious dogma. She writes:

*"The veil is not a symbol of piety; it is a tool of control. It hides not just a woman's face but her dreams, her voice, and her freedom."*¹¹

Through this, she challenges the religious justifications for practices that oppress women, advocating for their liberation from such constraints.

In *Parde ke Peeche*, Jahan also addresses the plight of women burdened by excessive childbearing and the societal preference for male heirs. The story features a poignant moment where a doctor advises a woman, exhausted from repeated pregnancies, to take control of her health and life. The doctor says:

*You must take care of yourself. If you continue like this, you will not survive. There are ways to prevent pregnancy—you must use them." She nodded weakly, but her eyes were filled with fear. What would her husband say? What would society say? She was nothing more than a vessel for his desires, a machine to produce sons."*¹²

This narrative was revolutionary for its time, as it openly discussed birth control and women's health, themes that were considered taboo in conservative societies.

As a doctor, Rashid Jahan was deeply concerned with women's health and education. Her writings often emphasized the importance of education and healthcare for women as a means of empowerment. She argues:

*"A woman without education is like a lamp without oil. She may exist, but she will never illuminate the world."*¹³

This belief is powerfully depicted in her one-act play, *Aurat*, where the protagonist, Fatima, represents the struggles of a woman confined within a patriarchal system. Deprived of education and the freedom to make choices, Fatima is left powerless, ultimately facing the harsh reality of her husband, Atiq, taking a second wife under the justification of religious reasons.¹⁴ Through Fatima's story, Jahan highlights the critical need for women's empowerment and education to prevent such oppressive and tragic outcomes.

While Rashid Jahan is widely celebrated for her focus on gender issues, she was equally committed to the anti-colonial struggle, viewing the fight for women's rights as inseparable from the broader movement for national independence.¹⁵ In her play *Woh* (That One), she critiques the collaboration of Indian elites with British colonial rulers while also addressing the dual oppressions of gender and class.

She writes,

*"How can we fight for freedom from the British when we enslave our own women? True independence begins with justice at home."*¹⁶

This statement truly provokes the hypocrisy of gaining freedom from colonial rule but practicing a patriarchal subjugation in Indian society. In the same play, Jahan also highlights exploitation of working-class women, stating,

*"The rich man's wealth is built on the sweat of the poor. But who will speak for the poor woman, whose labor is invisible and whose voice is silenced?"*¹⁷

This critique highlights the intersection of class and gender oppression, where women, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, face both economic exploitation and social destruction. In *Woh*, Rashid Jahan visualizes a form of resistance that is both anti-colonial and anti-oppressive,

calling for a holistic struggle against external domination and internal inequities. Her work stands as an influential reminder that true freedom cannot be attained without justice for all, mainly for those whose voices are often silenced.

Rashid Jahan's work was revolutionary for its time. She boldly challenged oppressive norms in her own writing, made appeals for women's rights, equality, and freedom from colonial rule. Her fearless criticism inspired countless writers to address issues like gender inequality, class struggles, and colonial oppression. Her stories, essays, and plays not only highlighted the struggles of her era but also paved the way for a more just society. Rashid Jahan's legacy stands as a powerful testament to her courage and dedication to social justice, continuing to inspire generations today.¹⁸

2.2 Ismat Chughtai (1911-1992)

Ismat Chughtai was a pioneering figure in Urdu literature and a key voice in the Progressive Writers' Movement (PWM). Educated at Aligarh Girls' School and Isabella Thoburn College, she was among the first generation of Indian Muslim women to receive a modern education, which profoundly shaped her literary voice. Chughtai's works are celebrated for their bold exploration of gender, sexuality, and societal hypocrisy, establishing her as one of the most significant resistance writers in Urdu literature.

Her literary career began in the 1930s, a period when the PWM used literature to challenge social and political injustices. Early works like *Kāfir* (Infidel, 1938), which depicted a Muslim girl eloping with her Hindu boyfriend, and *Genḍā* (Marigold, 1940), translated into English and published internationally, marked her as a fearless and innovative writer. Her iconic short story *Lihaaf* (The Quilt, 1942) broke new ground by exploring female sexuality and same-sex relationships.¹⁹

Chughtai's resistance literature is characterized by its unflinching critique of patriarchal norms and its portrayal of women as autonomous individuals rather than passive subjects. In her essay, she writes:

*"Men have always asserted their understanding of women, yet women have never offered any definitive claims about men. Men declared that 'man is cruel,' and women silently endured this cruelty; they labeled women as 'cowards,' and women even began to fear the smallest things; then, when men claimed that women could risk their lives in moments of need, women did so without hesitation. The affection of a mother is celebrated everywhere, but no one honors a father's role. Women's honor is considered sacred, yet no one questions a man's honor. In fact, men often lack honor in the first place, making it impossible for them to lose it. Women bear both legitimate and illegitimate children, but men do not. For centuries, philosophers have burdened women with every possible fault, either elevating them to divine heights or casting them into the gutter. Yet, they remain fearful of treating women as equals. Men are happy to revere women as goddesses or heavenly creatures but are reluctant to regard them as companions or equals."*²⁰

This passage encapsulates Chughtai's critique of the contradictions inherent in how women have been defined. She argues that society has long treated women either as unattainable ideals or as objects of shame, never allowing them the space to exist as equals to men. For Chughtai, the refusal to acknowledge women as companions or equals—rather than as idealized goddesses or degraded creatures—reveals the deep-rooted patriarchal fears and biases that restrict women's agency. Through her stories, she presents women as active, autonomous individuals capable of resisting societal constraints, offering a powerful critique of gender inequality and calling for a reimagining of women's roles as human beings deserving of equal respect and agency.

Chughtai's resistance also extends to her critique of rigid religious and cultural boundaries, as well as her advocacy for equality and secularism. In her short memoir *G̃ h̃ ubār-e Kāravān* (Caravan Dust), she writes:

*"I am Muslim. Worshipping idols is akin to infidelity. Yet the tales and legends of gods are my nation's inheritance. Encompassed within them are centuries of culture and philosophy. Faith is one thing; the culture of one's homeland is another. I am entitled to an equal share of it, just as I am entitled to an equal share of its earth, sunshine, and water."*²¹

This passage highlights Chughtai's resistance to societal norms that seek to divide people along

religious and cultural lines. She asserts her right to embrace both her Muslim identity and her

Indian cultural heritage, challenging the idea that faith and culture must remain separate. For Chughtai, equality and inclusivity are central to her vision of a progressive and modern society. Chughtai's defiance is further evident in *Lihaaf* (The Quilt, 1942), which explores themes of female sexuality and autonomy, breaking societal taboos and confronting patriarchal norms. Her works consistently advocate for the rights of women and marginalized communities, establishing her as a pivotal figure in Urdu resistance literature.

Chughtai's writings often focus on the struggles of marginalized women, including sex workers, maidservants, and young brides. In *Gainda* (Marigold, 1940), she critiques the oppressive caste system and its impact on women. Gainda, a low-caste domestic worker, becomes a victim of societal norms due to her relationship with an upper-caste Hindu man. Chughtai writes with deep empathy, humanizing Gainda's plight:

*"Gainda, widowed at a young age, was forced to abandon a normal life. The narrator tells her story with such compassion that it brings her humanity to the forefront."*²²

Chughtai's resistance extends to her critique of religious hypocrisy and the systemic oppression of women in postcolonial societies. In her autobiography *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan*, she recounts her childhood experiences of living in a patriarchal society, where women were silenced and oppressed: "I saw women around me suffer under the weight of patriarchy. I witnessed domestic violence and psychological trauma. These experiences left a lasting impression on me."²³

Chughtai also exposes the double standards of society, particularly regarding female education. She threatened to convert to Christianity if she was not allowed to pursue higher education, stating:

*"I'll get down at any situation, enquire about the mission school, and reaching there, I would convert and become a Christian. There, I shall have the opportunity to acquire as much education as I wish."*²⁴

Chughtai critiques the practice of early marriage and the dowry system, which she sees as tools of oppression. In *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan*, she describes the plight of young girls forced into marriage:

*"The idiot got her married when she was only six years old. Now I hear the boy is asking for a motorcycle. He thinks that his father-in-law works for the college so is quite well to do."*²⁵

This passage highlights the economic exploitation and lack of agency faced by young brides. Chughtai's resistance to these practices is evident in her own life, as she fought against her family's attempts to marry her off, declaring:

*"More than my desire for education was the terror of marriage."*²⁶

Chughtai's contributions to resistance literature extend beyond her fiction. She was also a prolific screenwriter and filmmaker, co-founding the production company Filmina with her husband, Shahid Latif. Her film *Garam Havā* (Scorching Winds, 1973), which depicted the struggles of an Indian Muslim family during Partition, won the President's Award for Best Film Story. Throughout her life, Chughtai remained a vocal advocate for gender equality and social justice, earning accolades such as the Padma Śrī for her contributions to Indian literature and education.

2.3 Fahmida Riaz (1946-2018)

Fahmida Riaz was a prominent Urdu poetess known for her resistance literature and feminist themes. She defied social norms by addressing subjects considered taboo, such as womanhood, desire, and personal freedom. Her poetry collection *Badan Dareeda* ("Torn Flesh"), published in 1973, faced intense criticism for its bold expression of female identity. However, Riaz firmly defended her right to articulate experiences that men freely expressed in literature. Beyond poetry, she was a committed political activist, opposing General Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship. Her fearless voice established her as a symbol of resistance in Urdu literature.²⁷

From *Badan Dareeda* collections, Riaz's poem *Chadar Aur Char Diwari* is an exemplary piece of her resistance literature, criticizing the societal expectations imposed on women, especially

within conservative cultural contexts. In this poem, the veil (chadar) and the four walls (char



diwari) serve as symbols for the restrictions placed on women's autonomy and freedom. Riaz's words powerfully express the internal struggle against societal repression, representing her ongoing criticism of patriarchal systems and their impact on women's identity and agency:

"The veil is a prison that hides my soul, My freedom is shackled, as I play the role. The four walls confine my dreams so wide,

My desires are crushed, nowhere to hide."²⁸

This poem represents the themes of female empowerment and resistance to patriarchal limitations that permeate Riaz's work. Through this, she critiques the role society imposes on women and highlights the urgent need for self-liberation and societal change.

Riaz's poetry not only critiques gender oppression but also serves as a critique of political and social issues. In her poem *Khākam Badahan*, Riaz reflects on the burdens imposed by societal structures, the weight of historical chains, and the desire for freedom of expression. Her words powerfully capture the essence of resistance to both personal and collective injustice, expressing an unwavering determination to continue speaking despite the forces that try to silence her:

"They say, 'Keep quiet, your voice is unwelcome But silence becomes a tomb for my soul.

I carry the weight of centuries of chains yet I still dream of a sky without limits."²⁹

Thus, Riaz critiques the oppressive forces that attempt to silence the voices of marginalized societies, particularly women, urging them to resist societal norms that suppress their voices. Her poem emphasizes the strength of the human spirit, even in the face of autocratic oppression, while calling for the dismantling of these structures and advocating for self-liberation and the freedom to express one's voice. In her poem *Pehla Pyar* ("First Love"), she reflects on the fragility and vulnerability within intimate relationships, revealing how societal expectations constrain personal and emotional freedom:

*"For the first time, after love, in each other's arms; in the fragile mirror of our mental and physical nakedness, we breathe carefully, afraid to shatter the glass idols."*³⁰

Fahmida Riaz's poetic voice resonates beyond national borders, as her poem:

*"It turns out you are just like us! Where have you been hiding all this time, my friend? That ignorance, that foolishness, which we endured for a century, has now reached your shores as well."*³¹

It encapsulates the collective disillusionment with rising communalism in both India and Pakistan. Her verse underlines the shared ignorance and intolerance that both countries have struggled with, highlighting the role of women's resistance in exposing these societal issues.

Riaz also conveys a sense of urgency and political awakening in her work, as seen in a poem inspired by the violence of the 1973 Rawalpindi incident. She captures the atmosphere of chaos and turmoil with the following lines:

"A swift wind blew from the west today; blood surged from beneath the dust, swirling through the streets, embracing pedestrians, banging against closed doors, waving like a flag over the town."³²

Her writings critique authoritarian regimes, military dictatorships, and religious extremism, reflecting her firm stance on democracy and human rights. In one poignant line, she writes:

*"I am a part of the night of oppression, yet I also await the arrival of dawn."*³³

In a similarly intense vein, her call for collective action in response to injustice takes shape in the following lines:

"Today, my fears left me suddenly. Today, my chest thirsts for blood, and I long to dance like a tornado."³⁴

Riaz's poems go beyond personal struggle, urging her countrymen to rise against the injustices they face, calling for a transformative dance of anger and hope:

, *Pahla Pyar* (The First Love), trans. Khan, *BBC*, 27 November 2018.



"Come, my countrymen, let us dance a dance of rage, imagination, grief, and repentance. Tear off the garments of convenience, wade through the rain of your tears, raise your arms in resistance, and let your bodies swirl in defiance."³⁵

Finally, her poetic imagery of resistance and revolution emerges as cities and circles of protest form:

"City after city, as we march, whirlpools of change will emerge in endless circles."³⁶ Further, in *Aerophyte* ("Akaas Bayl"), Riaz deepens her exploration of resistance, vividly portraying the oppressive force of a vine that drains the narrator's life force. This vine symbolizes the parasitic nature of societal and patriarchal control. The contrast between the narrator's inherited darkness and the oppressor's light echoes the power imbalance explored in *Chadar Aur Char Diwari* and *Khākam Badahan*. The narrator's trembling attempt to untangle the vine represents an act of defiance, underscoring Riaz's portrayal of resistance against exploitation and her quest for personal freedom:

I have inherited the black night, And you are endowed with the sun. I am sucked into a pataal, And you are claimed by the akaash."³⁷

This excerpt from *Aerophyte* builds on Riaz's ongoing critique of oppressive societal forces and highlights the narrator's attempt to break free from them, reinforcing her commitment to resistance and the pursuit of liberation.

3. Themes of Literary Resistance

The literary works of Ismat Chughtai, Rashid Jahan, and Fahimda Riaz stand as evidences to resistance against patriarchal, social, and religious oppression. Emerging from the Progressive Writers' Movement, these authors used literature as a powerful tool to challenge dominant ideologies. Their stories navigate themes of Patriarchy and Domestic Oppression, Gender and Sexuality as Forms of Resistance, Social and Religious Hypocrisy, and Class Struggles and Economic Oppression, provoking discourse that remains relevant today.

3.1 Critique of Patriarchy and Domestic Oppression

All three writers expose the domestic sphere as a site of gendered violence and control. Chughtai's *Gainda* (1952) presents a working-class woman, whose lack of financial independence subjects her to domestic servitude and abuse, reflecting a broader critique of economic dependence as a tool of patriarchal oppression.

Likewise, Jahan's medical background allowed her to witness firsthand the suffering of women due to marital neglect, forced pregnancies, and lack of medical care. Her writings call attention to how women's bodies become battlegrounds for patriarchal control. Her contributions to *Angaaray* (1932) ignited controversy by exposing the suffocating conditions imposed on women in Muslim households. She portrays women reclaiming their autonomy, questioning the silence enforced upon them. Jahan's activism extended beyond literature—her work in healthcare reinforced the link between women's physical suffering and patriarchal oppression.

Riaz's critique of patriarchy is evident throughout her poetry, especially in works like *Chadar Aur Char Diwari* and *Aerophyte*. She challenges the patriarchal control over women's lives, not just in the public sphere but also within the domestic realm. In *Chadar Aur Char Diwari*, the veil and four walls symbolize the confinement imposed by patriarchy. The "four walls" reflect the domestic spaces where women's roles are rigidly defined, stifling their aspirations. Similarly, in *Aerophyte*, the parasitic vine represents how patriarchy drains and dehumanizes women. Riaz's work highlights the emotional and psychological toll of living under patriarchal control, advocating for women's empowerment and freedom.

3.2 Gender and Sexuality as Forms of Resistance

One of the most groundbreaking themes in the works of Chughtai, Jahan, and Riaz is the exploration of female sexuality. In *Lihaaf* (1942), Ismat Chughtai boldly portrays female same-sex desire, a portrayal that was both shocking and unprecedented in South Asian literature. Through the relationship between the protagonist, Begum Jaan, and her female servant, Chughtai challenges the conventional views of desire and defies societal norms. She states in her memoir: "Lihaaf was not written to create a sensation. I was only exposing a reality that existed behind

closed doors." Similarly, Rashid Jahan's *Pardah ke Peechay* (1932) critiques the purdah system, arguing that it is not merely a veil but a mechanism of oppression that isolates women and suppresses their agency. Jahan's defiance extended beyond her writing—she was a practicing doctor who actively opposed gendered restrictions on education and employment. Her critiques were met with harsh condemnation from conservative circles, yet she remained steadfast, stating: "Literature is not meant to please. It is meant to unsettle."

Fahmida Riaz's poetry explores gender and sexuality as significant forms of resistance against societal repression. In poems like *Chadar Aur Char Diwari*, Riaz critiques the patriarchal systems that confine women within restrictive roles. The veil and four walls symbolize the oppression of women's autonomy, and her lines—"The veil is a prison that hides my soul"—illustrate how women's personal freedom and desires are stifled by societal expectations. Through her exploration of female sexuality, Riaz asserts that women have the right to own and express their bodies and desires, resisting the conservative norms that demand silence and submission. Her works affirm that the fight for gender equality and sexual autonomy is central to her resistance literature.

3.3 Social and Religious Hypocrisy

A critical thread that runs through their works is an unflinching exposure of the contradictions embedded within social and religious structures. Chughtai critiques religious orthodoxy in *Gh̄ubār-e Kāravān*, questioning how moral righteousness is selectively imposed. She argues that societal purity is a facade, selectively applied to control women while absolving men. Jahan, in her essays and fiction, highlights how religious morality is weaponized to limit female mobility and silence intellectual discourse. She aligns with the Progressive Writers' Movement's stance that literature must reject regressive traditions and embrace social reform.

Riaz's poetry critiques the social and religious hypocrisy that perpetuates gender and class-based oppression. In *Khākam Badahan*, her words reflect disillusionment with the societal structures that impose silence and subjugation. The poem's lines—"They say, 'Keep quiet, your voice is unwelcome, But silence becomes a tomb for my soul'"—denounce the hypocrisy of those who claim to uphold moral or religious values while stifling free expression and dissent. Her critique extends beyond gender and highlights the societal forces that demand conformity, stifling the voices of marginalized groups, particularly women. Her works encourage a collective resistance against these hypocritical forces, advocating for a society where individual freedoms are respected.

3.4 Class Struggles and Economic Oppression

The intersection of gender and class oppression is another dominant theme. Chughtai's depiction of working-class women in *Gainda* reveals how economic vulnerability exacerbates gender-based exploitation. The protagonist's poverty leaves her with little recourse against systemic abuse, highlighting the double marginalization faced by lower-class women. Similarly, Jahan's writings, influenced by her work as a physician, expose how wealth disparity translates into disparities in healthcare, education, and legal rights for women. She accounts the ruling elite for their apathy toward women's struggles.

Riaz's works also probe into class struggles and economic oppression, often linking these themes with her critique of patriarchy and societal injustice. In poems like *Pehla Pyar* and *Aerophyte*, the struggle against societal control is not only a matter of gender, but also of class. The narrator in *Aerophyte* struggles against a system that sucks her into darkness, symbolizing the economic and social forces that keep marginalized communities trapped in cycles of poverty and subjugation. Riaz's call for resistance against oppressive structures extends to economic inequalities, highlighting the interdependence of social, gender, and class oppression. She urges her audience to rise against these systemic forces in pursuit of a more just and equal society.

4. Impact and Legacy of Women's Resistance Literature

Chughtai, Jahan, and Riaz challenged patriarchal, social, and religious norms through their literature, making it a vital tool for feminist discourse and resistance movements in South Asia. Their works critiqued domestic oppression, explored female agency, and exposed societal hypocrisies, addressing not only women's struggles but also broader issues like gender inequality and women's autonomy. These contributions have significantly shaped Urdu literature, influencing



future generations of writers and activists who continue to use their themes of resistance to fight for gender justice.

The issues rose by these writers—gender inequality, social justice, and the critique of patriarchal norms—remain highly relevant today. Their work continues to fuel contemporary feminist activism and provides crucial insight into the historical roots of current gender equality struggles. Their literature reflects ongoing challenges women face globally and remains a powerful influence on modern feminist discourse, offering valuable lessons on the relationship between gender, social justice, and activism.

The lasting relevance of their works is clear today, as feminist movements like #MeToo³⁸ draw on the ideas these writers pioneered. They opened spaces for critical discussions on women's roles, addressing issues like forced marriage, domestic violence, and sexual autonomy. Their courage in tackling taboo topics helped shape the narrative around gender issues in South Asia, driving cultural and social change. Despite facing censorship, backlash, and legal challenges, their works endure, symbolizing literature's resilience as a form of resistance. Chughtai's *Lihaaf* (1942), for example, sparked a court trial, highlighting the controversy and significance of her contributions.

The future of feminist and resistance literature holds plenty of opportunities for exploration. Writers today can build on the foundations set by Chughtai, Jahan, and Riaz by tackling contemporary issues like social inequalities and the impact of digital media in amplifying women's voices. As resistance narratives evolve, influenced by global feminist movements, there's room for fresh expressions that push the fight for equality forward. There's also an opportunity to share untold stories, particularly from marginalized communities, broadening the reach of resistance literature.

It is equally important to keep engaging with the work of these pioneering writers. Through academic study, public dialogue, and cultural engagement, we ensure their voices stay vital in the ongoing fight for equality and social justice. Their literature isn't just part of history—it continues to inspire new generations to challenge the status quo. Preserving and sharing these works ensures that their relevance will persist, helping future generations better understand the power of literature as a tool for resistance. A sentiment that encapsulates the lasting impact of the works of Chughtai, Jahan, and Riaz in shaping both literature and society is observed by Diwan and Thakur (2025):

*"Feminist literature plays a crucial role in reshaping societal narratives by questioning entrenched power structures and offering alternative viewpoints."*³⁹

5. CONCLUSION

Chughtai, Jahan, and Riaz used their literature to challenge patriarchal and societal norms, leaving a lasting impact on feminist thought and Urdu literature. Their works continue to resonate today, addressing ongoing gender equality and social justice struggles. As feminist movements evolve, contemporary writers can build upon their legacies, exploring new narratives and amplifying marginalized voices. Continued engagement with their literature ensures its relevance in the ongoing fight for equality and social change.

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