

**Analysing the Contribution of Indian Women Writers towards
Female Empowerment during 19th and 20th Century**

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ZUBEDA AMEEN SAYYAD

Seat No: 22P0110047

ABC ID: 820345162546

PR No: 201809238

Under the Supervision of

DR. ANJALI CHAUBEY

Shenoi Goembab School of Languages and Literature

Discipline of English



GOA UNIVERSITY

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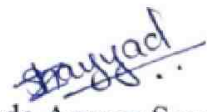
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I hereby declare that the data presented in this Dissertation report entitled, “Analysing the Contribution of Indian Women Writers towards Female Empowerment during 19th and 20th Century” is based on the results of investigations carried out by me in the Discipline in English at the Shenoai Goembab School of Languages and Literature, Goa University under the supervision of Dr. Anjali Chaubey and the same has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of a degree or diploma by me. Further, I understand that Goa University or its authorities will not be responsible for the correctness of observations / experimental or other findings given the dissertation.

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Zubeda Ameen Sayyad

22P0110047

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This is to certify that the dissertation report “**Analysing the Contribution of Indian Women Writers towards Female Empowerment during 19th and 20th Century**” is a bonafide work carried out by **Ms. Zubeda Ameen Sayyad** under my supervision in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master in Arts** in the Discipline of English at the Shenoι Goembab School of Languages and Literature, Goa University.



Dr. Anjali Chaubey

Signature and Name of Supervising Teacher

Date: 16th April 2024



Signature of Dean of the School/HoD of Dept

Date: 16th April 2024

Place: Goa University



School/Dept Stamp

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the Indian women writers have influenced female emancipation and empowerment. It focuses on the writings of women writers from the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Savitribai Phule, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Krupabai Sathianadhan; due to the paucity of research on their works. This research explores the convoluted gender roles, traditional socio-religious practices, caste, class, and gender-based discrimination, as well as issues that deny women their rights and an education; through close reading and textual analysis. It also reveals the hardships faced by Indian women as they attempt to free themselves and the female population from the shackles of patriarchy and subordination, which leads them into a desolate and alienating realm. Additionally, this research also explores the interpersonal and emotional relationships of the women with the outside world as represented in the chosen works, and it analyses how the authors have portrayed concerns of power dynamics, common stereotypes, and female oppression. Furthermore, the feminist theory is applied to each of the chosen texts to enhance analytical skills and deliver a more comprehensive understanding of the inequalities. The findings illustrate the persistent injustices and uneven treatment that is prevalent between the sexes for centuries, the writers' attempts to raise consciousness by highlighting the significance of education, and the research's lasting relevance in the literary world and current century.

Keywords: Female empowerment, gender inequality, patriarchy, religion, caste and class discrimination, social stereotypes, education, feminism, literature.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Importance and Reasons of the proposed Research

“Each time a woman stands up for herself without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women.”

~ Maya Angelou

This research is significant because it disagrees with the orthodox notion of women being incapable of creating works in the literary world owing to the fact that since centuries they have been treated as creatures of “low intellect”, “incompetent”, “inferior” and “second class citizens”. In many religious scriptures and beliefs, men have always been considered divine beings, superior to all other living creatures; thus, pushing women to the margins and confining them to the socially constructed traditions and norms. But the women writers were able to break the shell of ignorant attitude of females towards the ill-treatment they were subjected to and had such a profound influence on them, that majority of the people interested in reading and responding to their works were other women. We see change in the attitude of today’s society towards female community solely because the women in history vowed to proudly own and value their views about themselves and to express them in order to create awareness in the society and to extend education to all strata of the society. It is hence important to study the contribution of women writers of the 19th and 20th century India, as these women were courageous enough to raise their voice in the male-dominated society and bring about social change through their works. These efforts of Indian women writers to promote women’s self-worth, their freedom to make their own decisions and their right to have an impact on societal change for both themselves and others is referred to

as female empowerment. In the western countries, female empowerment is associated with the concept of feminism and its waves.

Feminism aims at complete gender equality in the social, political, economic, and cultural spheres as well as the abolition of sexist oppression and exploitation. According to the movement, gender differences—rather than biological differences—are the root cause of sex-based inequality, and women as a result of this have historically faced systemic social injustices. Charles Fourier is credited with coining the French term "*féminisme*," which is where the phrase originated. Jane Freedman in her work *Feminism* (2002) defines feminisms as “the assertion that feminisms concern themselves with women’s inferior position in society and with discrimination encountered by women because of their sex.”(1). She refers to it as "Feminisms" rather than "Feminism" because she thinks the movement is a vast and diverse collection of concepts and behaviours rather than a single, monolithic ideology. It can be argued that the term feminism emerged much later because, even before it did, influential steps were taken by western feminist and writer Mary Wollstonecraft’s, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, and the National Woman Suffrage Association, founded by activists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, challenging their inferior status in order to improve their social status, were some of the major achievements. (Freedman 2 – 3).

Based on historical records, feminism is said to have emerged in waves, with the first wave starting in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The first wave was largely concerned with formal equality between men and women and attempted to guarantee legal rights for women, such as the right to vote and property. The second wave, on the other hand, is thought to have started in the 1960s and 1990s and expanded the movement by tackling more broad issues like gender norms, job discrimination, and reproductive rights. It also underlined how political the personal can be and how social structures and conventions support gender inequality. With the realization that women's experiences are influenced by racial, social

class, and sexual orientation, as well as by addressing many types of oppression, the third wave concentrated on intersectionality and inclusion. The development of the internet furthered the dissemination of these concepts. Since the fourth wave is continuous and deals with related concepts, it is an extension of the previous waves. Aside from the waves, different forms of feminism also present a distinctive viewpoint on discrimination against women and gender equality; and support diverse approaches to bringing about societal change. Among its varieties are ecofeminism, Marxist/Social feminism, radical feminism and liberal feminism.

1.1.1 Feminism in Indian Context

Except for the educated elites, women in pre-independence India were unaware of the existence of the movement or the term feminism. There was no such thing as feminism as a theoretical approach in India, Asia, or any former colony. (Bhat and Wani 95). The aforementioned claim does not imply that there was never a movement supporting women's rights and rebelling against the persecution they endured. There was a movement that represented women's hardships, goals, and victories in their pursuit of justice and empowerment and marked a pivotal moment in Indian history. This movement, which was thought to be a women's liberation movement, began in the 19th century as a social reform movement spearheaded by visionary men like Swami Vivekananda, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jotirao Phule, and others in order to free women from the constraints of tradition. "In India, the social reforms movement of the 19th century, women's participation in national politics and Gandhiji's efforts to foster an ideology, ... can be explained as the movement for women's emancipation" (Bhat and Wani 94). It's interesting to note that, in contrast to female-led western feminism, in India male activists were the pioneers of the women's movement, as they fought against caste discrimination and against practices such as, child marriage, purdah, idolatry, polygamy, and sati. When the spouses,

sisters, daughters, and other women related to the male activists joined and created a unique category of "women's activism," the movement underwent an incredible transformation.

As a result, women's rights and wrongs emerged as central concerns of the revolutionary National movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when women's autonomous organizations were established. The movement was most successful in Maharashtra and Bengal because these two states produced a large number of works by writers from both states that addressed social issues, emphasized the value of education, and established organizations that supported social reform. Atmiya Sabha, an organization founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, was one such group where women's education was initially debated. In addition to the male leaders, a number of organizations, groups, schools, and councils were established by female activists such as Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, Mataji Tapaswini, Sarojini Naidu, Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Savitribai Phule, and others in order to advance the movement and reach out to all the sections of the society. As a result, Sati was outlawed in India and female education was significantly elevated, giving educated women a platform to write about their experiences and the status of women. Women's issues became a national priority as a result of the Indian activists and reformers absorbing western concepts of liberty, equality, and brotherhood. As Gandhi called on Muslim and Hindu women to join the political movement and highlight their strength and importance in national affairs when the National Freedom Struggle began it enabled women to communicate with the outside world for the first time in India's history. Additionally, the demands of women workers were highlighted and worries about equal chances at work were brought up with the founding of The Women's Indian Association. In addition, Sarojini Naidu advocated for women's suffrage, a cause that Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and other female reformers backed. Women's involvement in a number of national campaigns, such as the Satyagrahi movement, the Salt March, the Quit India movement, and others, gave them legitimacy within the Indian National Congress and the

Indian government. Furthermore, reformers like Tarabai Shinde (who wrote *Stri Purush Tulana*, criticizing the patriarchy in India), Pandita Ramabai (who criticized the caste system and patriarchy in Hinduism and ultimately converted to Christianity), and Savitribai Phule (who founded schools for girls in India and wrote on the themes of oppression, caste and class discrimination, and importance of education) raised majority of women's issues, which aided in the women's liberation movement.

In a nutshell the women's liberation movement prior to independence is referred to as the first wave of feminism since the women accused religion and customs of being the source of their suffering. In addition to acknowledging their subjugated status, they argued “women could bring special knowledge of the household and family matters to forums where public policy was debated and formulated”, and worked for educational and socio-political change. (Jaiswal, 581). Thus, the rise of women's freedom in India is a reflection of a long history of adversity, resiliency, and advancement in the direction of social justice and gender equality.

1.2 Scope and Limitations of the research

Contribution of women writers to female empowerment offers wide scope for research, since it provides avenues for exploring the status of women in the 19th and 20th century India and the changing situation in the ongoing century. The women writers have paved the way towards female empowerment alongside men and created magnificent works that help in understanding the various factors that lead to gender-based discrimination hence providing opportunities for exploration. Also, a study of this nature helps in understanding the basis of the consistent prevalence of female marginalisation and oppression in the current century. The study could also be useful for researchers as well as the society, as very less research has been conducted on some of the women writers of pre-independent India. This study will therefore cover the

women writers like Savitribai Phule – one of the first female teachers in India, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain – India's first Bengali Islamist-feminist; and Krupabai Sathianadhan – the first woman novelist in English from India; and their works *Kaavya Phule* (poetry collection), *Sultana's Dream* (short story) and *Padmarag* (novel), and *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* (novel), respectively. These are the most prominent yet less-studied works of women writers who expressed themselves through these compositions during the 19th and 20th century India. Thus, this research topic has a wide potential for exploration and examination.

1.2.1 Limitations of the Study

- Only the chosen primary texts and secondary sources are the subject of this study.
- The chosen writers are credited with multiple works and have produced amazing masterpieces. This dissertation, however, will not examine their other works.
- The selected primary texts are rich with more narrative techniques, which could not be analysed in this dissertation.
- Therefore, certain areas may not be covered, as the study will solely focus on the short-listed objectives and research questions.

1.3 Research Problem / Questions

- How did Indian women writers of the 19th and 20th centuries address gender roles, subjugation and resistance in their writings?
- What role does patriarchy, religion, caste and class play in female oppression?
- In what ways do female education and literature support women's empowerment in India?
- Why is it essential to examine the works from a feminist standpoint?

1.4 Relevance and Necessity of the proposed Research

1.4.1 Necessity in the field of Languages and Literature

Women's literature is a discrete area of study in the field of languages and literature, because it is their sex that has shaped their experiences since history, making the fact evident that the portrayal of women in the patriarchal society and their struggles, in the works of male writers highly lack the characteristics of lived experiences and reality. Also, in colonial India, the women writers not only challenged the stereotypes but also inspired others to break the barriers and gain freedom for themselves by educating themselves and their children. More importantly, the encounters of Indian women differ from that of Western women in terms of their religion, caste, class, beliefs, customs and traditions making it worthy of a separate study.

Literature is one of the means that educates all the generations and helps in understanding various aspects of social circle like power dynamics, cultural stereotypes, gender-based discrimination, sexually coded roles and responsibilities, etc. This research will therefore cover the representation of all the above aspects in the selected works and their relevance to the field of languages and literature. Also, women's literature of nineteenth and twentieth century India is rarely studied for varied reasons, making it a significant research topic in this field.

1.4.2 Relevance to the Society

This research is relevant not only in the literary field but also to the society, because it will inspire the readers to study the works of social reformers like Savitribai Phule, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Krupabai Satthianadhan, as they used their writing to promote gender equality in the general public. The research will involve a detailed study of the works of selected authors, as the writers have raised awareness of issues such as sexism, patriarchy and the objectification of women, hence making it

a relevant study to the society as well. It will also encourage the common masses to not limit themselves to the study of western feminist phases, but to rather explore the struggles of Indian women writers and to appreciate their efforts and works. This research will also motivate the readers to read the literary works of other women writers as well, because it is essential for everyone to bridge the gap and understand the lived experiences of women, and to learn the low standards of patriarchy, everyday casual micro-aggressions and the struggle to survive the threats that women are surrounded with. Therefore, it is important to explore and analyse the literature of strong women overcoming obstacles, challenging the orthodox and hypocritical beliefs of the society and the struggles that they faced to make space in the literary field and to bring about change for a better tomorrow.

1.5 Objectives of research proposed

- To explore the contribution of 19th and 20th century Indian women writers to Female Empowerment.
- To analyse the complex gender roles that prevailed in the 19th and 20th century India.
- To highlight the role of patriarchy, caste and religion in female oppression.
- To study the portrayal of women and their relationship with the society in the selected texts.
- To analyse the selected texts through a feminist perspective.
- To understand the role literature plays in the empowerment of women in India.

1.6 Literature Review

The literature created by women writers help us recognize the social construction of women's traditional and modern roles, our responses to these roles and also the conflicts generated by them. This understanding thus forms a basis of the actions meant

for women's empowerment and questions the prevalent old patriarchal domination in the practical domains. Therefore extensive research conducted in the selected field emphasises the importance of research in the field of women's literature and hence, led to the following findings:

Majji Jhansi Lakshmi, in her research paper entitled "Women Empowerment in India: Historical Evolution" published in the *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, explores the evolution of women empowerment in India and examines three broad historical periods, namely: Ancient and Medieval India, Colonial India, and Independent India. In the first period, Lakshmi studies the position of women in the patriarchal society and talks about the shift from matriarchy (where women were worshipped) to patriarchy (where women were oppressed and denied individual freedom). In the second period, the author explores the emergence of colonisers and loss of women's economic independence. The author also explores the freedom movement and talks about the social reformists like Annie Basent, Pandita Ramabai Ranade, Sarojini Naidu, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, etc. and their contribution to women's empowerment. In the last period, Lakshmi observes the functional change in the position of women in Indian society, claiming that the appeals of 19th century social reformers to educate women have contributed in enhancing women's status. (Lakshmi 259).

Jaiswal, Anuradha, in her research paper entitled "The Evolution of Women's Movement in Colonial India", published in the *JSTOR* archive; analyses the women's movement that began in the pre-independence period from 1800's and lasted till 1947. The author analyses the wrongs done to women which became the major issues and gave rise to the prominent figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandita Ramabai, Mataji Tapaswini and D. K. Karve. Jaiswal further explores the major

organisations like Women's Indian Association, National Council of Women in India, All-India Women's Conference, Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Theosophical Society that supported female education in India and worked towards women empowerment. The author also explores the movements like abolitionist movement, women's education movement that dealt with the issues like caste discrimination, polytheism, idolatry, animism, purdah, child marriage and sati practise, which highly contributed in promoting social construction of gendered norms. (Jaiswal 577).

In the archives of Bollywood, if one has to think of early feminist movies, then *Mirch Masala*, released in 1987, is one such thought-provoking movie that stands out. It is directed by Ketan Mehta, a renowned Indian film director since 1975. It is adapted from a short story called "Abhu Makarani" by Chunilal Madia and is set in colonial India, portraying the status and situation of women in India during the British rule. Ketan Mehta vividly portrays the picture of the socially constructed gender roles, women's subjugation at the hands of society, patriarchal beliefs, female marginalisation, etc. prevailing in the 19th and 20th century. The director portrays some strong female characters who struggle to keep their dignity intact and challenge and fight the social threats and the so called patriarchal beliefs, customs and traditions. It is therefore one of the strong early feminist movies which sheds light on the women in colonial India and how they challenge the orthodox traditions, customs and norms surrounding them. (Mehta).

e-PG Pathshala, an open educational resource, provides lecture series on various important topics and 'Women and literature', a paper under the field of *Women Studies*, is one such important topic. The speaker, in one of the lectures called "Indian Women Writers", discusses the emergence of women writers in India during Pre and Post – Independence era. The author talks about how Buddhism offered women a certain level

of freedom, allowing them to pursue things outside the boundaries of their homes where women began to write poetries in Pali language. The speaker also talks about the Bhakti tradition of 12th century AD, where some women poets wrote poetry in reaction to caste oppression. Furthermore, the speaker explores the 19th century British India and speaks about how with the advent of Indian renaissance, the reformist movements and the freedom struggle, Indian women entered the social world and began educating themselves and creating literary works. One such emerging writer who wrote during nineteenth and early twentieth century was Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. And lastly, the speaker explores the women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Parwer Jhabwala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai, etc.; of post-independent India and analyses their works. (Vidya-mitra).

In a research article called “Nation, Reform and Resistance: Indian Women Writings in the Pre-Independence Era”, published in the *International Journal of Humanities, Engineering, Science and Management*, research scholar Sanghita Jash tries to show the bulk of women writings to explain the discourse of education and hegemony that influenced colonial modernity, as it is believed to be a significant factor in the nationalist movement of India. Jash briefs the readers about the women writers of 19th and early twentieth century and their important works. Apart from the well-known writers like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Savitribai Phule, Pandita Ramabai and Rambai Ranade; Jash also covers the less known writers like Begum Faizunnisa Choudhurani, Swarnakumari Devi, Binodini Dasi, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Krupabai Satthianadhan, etc. Apart from the writers, Jash also explores the reforms and transformations like the prohibitive practices of Sati system, custom of child marriage, restrictions on the widows, abolition of caste-based discrimination, establishment of Arya Samaj, girls’ schools, etc. that took place during the British rule. (Jash 124).

Along with the Indian women's empowerment movement, Western feminists have also been studied, as the thoughts of Indian feminists and social reformers were highly inspired by the prominent western figures. Peter Barry, a British writer and academic, in his article "Feminist Criticism", published in the second edition of *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, explores the concepts of feminism and feminist criticism in the western countries, by analysing the women's movement of 1960s; and states that the movement was not the start of feminism, rather, it just renewed the old tradition of thoughts and actions and the issue of women's inequality in the society as portrayed in the classic books. The author discusses prominent figures like Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Wolf, Olive Schreiner, Simone de Beauvoir, and Elaine Showalter and analyses some of their important works; bringing out the impact their works had on the women's liberation in the west. Furthermore, Barry examines the phases of feminist criticism, exploring how it became more eclectic, shifted its focus from attacking male versions of the world to exploring the nature of the female world, and how it switched to constructing a new canon of women's writing and gave the neglected women writers new prominence. Lastly, the author examines the three particular areas of feminist criticism namely, 'Feminist criticism and the role of theory', 'Feminist criticism and language' and 'Feminist criticism and psychoanalysis' in this work. (Barry 121).

In another research paper by Archana Malik-Goure, entitled "Feminist Philosophical Thought in Colonial India", published in the *Journal of East-West Thought*; the author explores Pandita Ramabai, Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule's feminist thoughts by studying their efforts in women's empowerment. The author reviews Savitribai Phule's works and examines the impact her husband's thoughts and teachings had on her and how these teachings were carried forward by Savitribai Phule.

Some of the works that Malik-Goure has reviewed are *Kaavya Phule*, *Bahvan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar* and *Karz*; concluding with the statement that Savitribai Phule, in her literature portrays the repeatedly experienced distress, aspirations and feelings of women in India. The author also analyses Jyotiba Phule as a 'Father of Indian Social Revolution', with special emphasis on his raised question of 'Why tradition dishonoured woman?'; observed by Simon de Beauvoir's observation- 'Women are made, they are not born'. (Malik-Goure 25).

In yet another article entitled "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: Tireless Fighter of Female Education and their Independence – A Textual Analysis", published in the *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*; Mahmud, Rashed talks about the social issues of womanhood, seclusion, women's degradation, subjugation, suffering and the contemporary problems that prevail in the society. Mahmud examines Hossain's prominent works; and discusses the depiction of above mentioned issues. The author in this article, emphasises the importance of female education, economic independence and eradication of ignorance, because only when women achieve these three goals, can they breach the patriarchal boundaries and retain their deserved position in the society. Hence, Mahmud in this article studies the dedication of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain towards female empowerment. (Mahmud 40).

Seema Kar Kajal in her exploration paper, named as "The Role of Feminism in India by Krupabai Satthianadhan, Cornelia Sorabji and Sarojini Naidu ", published in the *International Journal of Research in Engineering, IT and Social Sciences*, analyses the feminist voice of Satthianadhan, Sorabji and Naidu as they were the three leading lawyers of women's equivalency in nineteenth and twentieth century India. The author further examines the works of these writers which were written to convey their social reformist beliefs, where Satthianadhan used novel as her form of expression and created novels like *Kamla: A story*

of *Hindu Life* and *Saguna: A story of native Christian life*. Cornelia Sorabji used narratives to partake connections between the lives of her characters and with the traditional lives of numerous Indian women. And Sarojini Naidu conveyed her deep confirmed beliefs on women's equivalency and the necessity for change in the treatment of women confined within society, through her poetry. (Kajal 14).

Edgardh, Karin, in her Master's Thesis in relative Literature, entitled *Texts and Paratexts in a Colonial Context: Krupabai Sathianadhan's English Novels Saguna and Kamal*, provides the synopsis of Sathianadhan's both the below textbooks and attempts to assay the original forwards of both the novels as paratexts, written by two English ladies in Madras. Edgardh tries to understand the paratexts through the propositions of Gerard Genette, i.e. to probe how the paratexts introduce the compendiums to the narratives and interpret the social converse of the time. She further observes that Krupabai Sathianadhan's gests of ethnical demarcation and her ambivalence concerning the English, were ignored in these prolusions to her novels. The author then, also explores the publication history of Sathianadhan's novels and their postcolonial reanimation because her novels were largely neglected during the struggle for independence and were latter rediscovered by feminist postcolonial erudite scholars in the early 1990s. Thus, in the thesis, Edgardh, discusses Krupabai Sathianadhan's life, her family and her jottings in detail and also provides a relative analysis of both the novels and analyses the forward of *Saguna* by Mrs. Benson and *Kamala* by Mrs. Grigg. (Edgardh 4).

It's also important to understand the difficulties and issues faced by women authors to gain recognition in the patriarchal erudite world. Therefore, in the essay, "Infection in the Sentence: the woman writer and the anxiety of authorship" by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar of 1979, published in the work *Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory proposition and criticism*, edited by robyn r. warhol and daime price herndl; the authors explore the

proposition of ‘anxiety of authorship’. The essay gives an overview of the proposition as portrayed by Gilbert and Gubar in their text *The Madwoman in the Attic*. In both; the textbook and the essay, Gilbert and Gubar links the major 19th century women authors like Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Mary Shelley, etc.; together by what they called as the ‘anxiety of authorship’, which was an adaption of Harold Bloom’s ‘anxiety of influence’. Gilbert and Gubar sought to acclimate Bloom’s proposition that addresses of male authors’ fear of failing as writers internalized from their erudite fathers; and try to tell the story of women writers who “allayed their distinctive anxieties of authorship by following Dickinson’s notorious advice to ‘Tell the truth but tell it slant’”. Both these authors thus, examine the works of female authors to expose and link the accounts of anxiety and madness their works contained and show how their works relate to the struggles faced by these women pens in real life. (Gilbert, Gubar 21).

Chandra P. Agrawal, in his exploration composition entitled “Configurations in Ashes Twentieth Century Indian Women Writers”, attempts to explore the Indian women authors comprehensions of other women as ‘the self’ in relation to the socio-political climate that supported these comprehensions, during the 20th century. Agrawal divides the authors into four ages; ‘The Consciousness Raisers’, ‘The Explorers’, ‘The Rebels’ and ‘The Free Thinkers’. In the first period, the author analyses the works of prominent women authors of India like Mahadevi Varma, Ashapura Devi and Lalithambika Anterjanam and examines how they attacked patriarchy, prejudices and how they were dehumanised by every man around them. According to the author, the pens like Amrita Pritam, Krishna Sobti and Shanti Joshi were ‘the explorers’ of independent India, who glorified woman’s gender and explored woman from numerous angles, investing her with an understanding of ‘self’, creative inflexibility and agentive strength. Kamala Das and Muppala Ranganayakamma were ‘the revolutionists’ of 1930s, who constructed the individuality of women as women and explored

women's subjectivity in their works. And the last period includes the pens Shobha De, Suniti Namjoshi and Meena Alexander of 1970s, who explore the ironic condition of modern mortal, 'who like a robot is driven by the drive- buttons of individual and social habits.' Agrawal concludes the paper by stating that the four above ages demonstrate an astounding change in Indian women writers' perceptions and construction of the woman in the society. (Agrawal 132).

Thus, through this literature review, it's apparent that women's literature of the nineteenth and twentieth century is an important content that needs to be studied considerably, because just like the western women pens, Indian women writers too faced severe oppressions, demarcation, inequality, subjection and anxiety of authorship in large environment and have plodded throughout their lives to make some space for themselves in the male- dominated society. Also, through the findings it's apparent that there have been veritably lower exploration conducted on the women authors like Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Savitribai Phule and Krupabai Satthianadhan and their works, hence proving that there's a wide scope for exploration in this field.

1.7 About the Authors

- Savitribai Phule

A poet, who was born and brought up in Naigaon, Maharashtra; who was a crucial figure in improving the lives of Indian women, is believed to be the pioneering figure in India's women's liberation movement. Savitribai Phule, the social reformer, famously known either as 'a crusader of female education' or as 'the wife of Jyotirao Phule', was most importantly a revolutionary poet in the literary circles and is therefore hailed as the mother of modern poetry, who necessitated English language through her poems. She along with her husband not only opened the nation's first schools for women, but also established organisations like Mahila Seva Mandal, Satyashodhak

Samaj and a home for the prevention of infanticide in order to create awareness regarding women's rights. Also, as she herself belonged to Mali community now categorised as an OBC; and was married off to Jotiba Phule at the age of nine, depriving her of education, she realised the need for educating the lower castes and hence opened a society to promote the education of Mahars, Mangs and other lower castes. Nevertheless, she was educated by Jotiba during a period when women were denied education and therefore India had its first female teacher who gave her best to improve the social conditions of the time. Gail Omvedt unfolds this dedication of Savitribai in *Understanding Caste From Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond*, and writes, "Savitribai was the first ... of the nineteenth century Maharashtrian feminists, taking up ... the teaching of Dalit boys and girls ... enduring the abuse and dung-throwing of brahman women as she went to her work." (31).

- Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain

The first woman Muslim writer from colonial Bengal, a feminist and educationist, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain has composed many ambitious and inspirational works of fiction that depict the struggles of Indian women across nation and strives to establish an ideal place and life where the women are accorded equal treatment. Born in a Bengali aristocratic but conservative family, she also experienced discrimination at every stage of her life; from observing purdah even in front of the women to facing the wrath of her husband's family for setting up a school for girls and vocational training centres for women who were financially deprived, girls of underprivileged backgrounds and widows in distress. She imparted education to these women and asked them to extend it to other sections of the society as well like slums and wronged women. She was highly inspired by her elder brother and sister Ibrahim and Karimunnessa; and by her husband Sakhawat Hossain; as it was because of their teachings that she was able to

remove the patriarchal prejudices from her mind and inculcate modern thoughts. The wisdom gained from these influential people she applied into her writings both in Bangla and English, creating socio-critical essays, short-pieces on reformation, books and novels, motivating the Bengali female community to receive education in order to emancipate themselves. She therefore calls out to the women and says, "... We are not animals; speak up sister. We are not furniture; speak out daughter. We are not any object like bejewelled ornaments to be confined into the iron chest; everyone speak out altogether, we are human beings!" (Mahmud 43).

- Krupabai Sathianadhan

A gifted writer of the nineteenth century, although the first woman writer in English, she is still unknown to literature students as well as the public. Born in Maharashtra to a Brahmin family which later converted to Christianity, she was able to experience life and practices of both the religions which urged her to write two full-length novels called *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* and *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*. *Saguna* is autobiographical in nature and the first novel written in English by a woman; while *Kamala* reveals the conflict that women come across when they leave their four comfortable walls behind and enter the inhumane outside world. Like Rokeya Hossain, Krupabai also was influenced by her brother Bhaskar who shared with her the realm of knowledge. In her path to achieve her aim of becoming a doctor in order to help the needy ones and purdah women who were too shy to visit male doctors; she discovered her talent of writing and soon after dropping out because of ill health. Nevertheless after her marriage, she began to write articles and soon composed her first novel *Saguna*. Her desire to help the destitute thus began from a very early stage of her life. She was the popular feminist writer of the time who gained recognition not only in India but worldwide, for her novels reached and were appreciated by the Queen of

England. Thus, in most of her works, Krupabai reveals the dangers of the society and criticizes the customs, traditions, superstitions and scandalous ways of the world.

1.8 Synopsis of the Primary Texts

- Savitribai Phule's *Kaavya Phule*

“Awake, Arise and Educate

Smash Tradition – Liberate! ”

~ Savitribai Phule

Savitribai has two inspirational poetry collections to her credit that contributed remarkably to Marathi literature. The first being *Kaavya Phule*, originally published in Marathi in the year 1854. It was recently translated into English by Priyamwada Redican Chakne, a spoken word artist and educationist, and was published in the year 2022. *Kaavya Phule* contains a whole of forty one poems and discusses a wide range of reformative themes and sentimental and analytical values that poetries generally express. This collection is written in the traditional form of writing like ‘ovees’ and ‘abhang’, a folk form that are meant to be sung in Marathi. In the collection, Savitribai addresses some of the important themes like caste and gender discrimination, education, child welfare and untouchability along with the subjects of social reform. Apart from the aforementioned themes, the collection also has an eclectic mix of other topics ranging from nature poems about various flowers and butterflies to poems dedicated to some brave historical figures such as Chatrapati Shivaji and Queen Tarabai; and also contains spiritual poems. The poet, most importantly foregrounds the importance of English education through her poetry as she that it can provide social justice and freedom to everybody from mental and physical oppression. Therefore, during the period when Brahmins, the so called upper class, were busy propagating rituals and customs of hate and segregation, Savitribai Phule had the courage and potential to not

only fight this indoctrination, but also to promote education and self-realisation making her work relevant not only in the literary canons but also vital to the present day and society. The language employed in the composition of the poems is hence, simple and effective allowing the commoners to comprehend the poems easily and to inculcate the ideas and values in everyday life.

- Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag*

➤ Sultana's Dream

Sultana's Dream is a short prose work originally written in English and published in the year 1905 in the *Indian Ladies' Magazine* in Madras; the first English language periodical edited by Indian women and about Indian women and co-edited by Sarojini Naidu. It is about a utopian feminist country called Ladyland where the women rule and control all the aspects of their life as well as that of their men and are aided with new technological innovations like solar energy and flying cars that they themselves have created in order to make their lives easier. Hossain describes the lives of these women in detail and highlights the modernisation and transformations made by them in their country. Along with various innovations; women have also introduced a new religion whereby the concepts of love, humanity and kindness are practiced.

The story is set in the imaginary and unconventional place called Ladyland, where men are confined to the *zenana* / *mardana* and are excluded from the community and the social affairs that take place around them. As men are blessed with brawn they perform the domestic tasks, while the women, having acquired good education and intellect, have furthered the progress of technology and humankind by inventing flying cars, making air travel the only mode of transport; automated agricultural and other industries where land is cultivated by electrical motors; and control the weather without any assistance from men. The women here are led by a queen who makes it mandatory

for all the women to acquire education and involve in scientific research. In the narrative, R. S. Hossain criticizes the purdah system, along with criticising the socially constructed religions that perpetuate the hierarchical structures and destroy social unity; by introducing a new religion that unites everyone. Hossain particularly lays stress on the importance of universal female education and women familiarizing themselves with the outer scientific world by implying that the driving force behind the success of Ladyland is women's education. To conclude, Barnita Bagchi, an interdisciplinary feminist academic; in the 'Introduction' of *Padmarag*, rightly states, "*Sultana's Dream* cheerfully cocks a snook at male supremacy by demonstrating how women use their intelligence to achieve the very same goals that men have fallen short of despite their show of physical might and military power" (Bagchi 19).

➤ *Padmarag*

Unlike *Sultana's Dream*, *Padmarag* is her less-known but most remarkable work originally written in Bengali and published in the year 1924. Its first translation into English appeared in 2005, translated with an introduction by Barnita Bagchi, an interdisciplinary feminist academic. If read closely and compared to the author's life and experiences, one arrives to the conclusion that *Padmarag* is a semi-autobiographical work of R. S. Hossain. The story is set in Calcutta, Bengal in Tarini Bhavan, an institution consisting of a school for girls, a workshop / training institute for adult women, a shelter for widows and a home for the ailing and the destitute. It is founded by Dina-Tarini Sen, a widow who struggled and strived hard to acquire the deserved position in the patriarchal society; and is run by the women belonging to different religions, castes, regions, races and ethnic backgrounds; who have equally struggled and subjugated at the hands of an orthodox society but had the strength to improve their circumstances through the equal opportunities and education provided to

them at Tarini Bhavan. The work consists of a range of hybrid women characters who try to create a utopia through their everyday activities and bond with each other by sharing their tragic pasts with other members of Tarini Bhavan.

The tragic personal narratives of suffering and development of Hossain's female protagonists keeps on unfolding throughout the novel which simultaneously offers us an insight into the indictment of society where familial, marital and sexual practices drive women either to madness or on the brink of suicide. The most remarkable feature of *Padmarag* that stands out is the manner in which Hossain has portrayed the office life and the professional activities carried by women during the early twentieth century when the mere thought of women acquiring basic education was considered to be an offence. Yet Hossain boldly portrays a much needed equitable society by shattering the traditional gender roles in *Padmarag*. Both *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag*, have a common and dominant theme that rightly attracts the reader's attention i.e. the importance of education which is the key to women's liberation and empowerment.

- Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life by Krupabai Satthianadhan

Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life, was published in the year 1894. Mrs. H. B. Grigg, in the 'Introductory Memoir' to *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*; gives us an insight into the circumstances under which the work was completed by the author as she says:

It was written with feverish eagerness ... When too ill to hold a pen she would dictate, and some of the last chapters were dictated to her husband when her temperature was actually at 104°. "Let me show that even a simple Indian girl can do something useful", she pleaded, and this desire was granted to her (Grigg 28).

Krupabai Satthianadhan was determined to prove to the world that women too are capable of accomplishing their aims if they strive for it. Similarly *Kamala: A Story of*

Hindu Life portrays the struggles and efforts of the protagonist Kamala to survive in a patriarchal society and adjust in an unfamiliar setting soon after her marriage at a young age. The conflict that we are introduced to in *Kamala* is that of the conflict between “the inner world of innocence and beauty and the outer world of ignorance, superstitions and deception” (Mund). The novel is about the protagonist being born and brought up in the lap of nature, who is as innocent as a flower and had the freedom to live her childhood to the fullest before her early marriage. The author explores the functioning of Indian society during 19th century, where women enjoy the 5% of the freedom provided to them at their house, followed by their imprisonment and suppression through early marriages which ends with the destruction of women’s self. Krupabai sketches the life of Kamala in the similar manner to depict the male dominance; as the miseries, humiliation and oppression faced by women becomes apparent through the course of the novel which persists till date. Therefore the conflict that we are introduced to in the novel is that of “the inner world of innocence and beauty and the outer world of ignorance, superstitions and deception” (Mund).

Nevertheless, just like the other selected texts; the author sheds light on the new emerging women of India who seem to have realised their worth as they can be seen handling their problems intellectually, proving their importance to the world and bring about the change for a better tomorrow through their actions. Although the novel ends with Kamala’s death, the author makes sure through Kamala’s actions that the women out there learn a lesson and strive for equality.

1.9 Formulation of Hypothesis

Indian women writers of 19th and 20th century not only explored the factors leading to female subjugation, but more importantly foregrounded the importance of resistance

through their works. Hence, they liberated the women from the stronghold of social evils and empowered the female community.

1.10 Research Methodology for proposed research

- This will be a qualitative study consisting of a detailed analysis of the selected primary texts.
- The objectives and hypothesis of the research will be taken into consideration during the study.
- Each primary text will be analysed through a feminist lens and their relevance to the present century will be studied.

1.11 Chapterization

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter one introduces the background of the women's liberation movement in India and feminism in the west; it also covers a brief biography of selected women writers that will be analysed in detail in the forthcoming chapters. Moreover, it will state the importance, relevance, scope and limitations of the study, aims and objectives, research questions, literature review, hypothesis and research methodology that will be incorporated during the study. It also includes a brief synopsis of the selected primary texts.

Chapter 2: A Glimpse into the Journey of Hope: From Female Subjugation to Resistance

The Second Chapter explores and evaluates the concerns of gender roles, female subjugation and alienation in the selected works of Indian women writers, along with establishing the correlation between above two concepts and provide relevant examples from the texts to portray how women resisted the rigid gender codes, oppression and other social evils.

Chapter 3: A Step Towards Emancipation: Analysing the Importance of Education

The Third Chapter undertakes a detailed analysis of the novels, the short story and the poetry collection and critically evaluates the role of patriarchy, religion, caste and class system in female oppression and denial of women's rights, along with emphasis on female education as portrayed in the texts.

Chapter 4: “Metamorphosis of Women from Oppression to Empowerment”: A Feminist Insight into the Texts

The Fourth Chapter provides a theoretical background to the study. It includes a detailed analysis of the selected texts through a feminist perspective as it will evaluate various concerns, issues and struggles studied in feminist criticism. It will also explore the role literature plays in women empowerment and will lastly provide a summary of how women writers contributed to female empowerment.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Fifth Chapter will be the concluding chapter of the study, which will brief the analyses of the research conducted. It will provide the observations and the conclusion of the study along with recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

A GLIMPSE INTO THE JOURNEY OF HOPE: FROM FEMALE

SUBJUGATION TO RESISTANCE

2.1 Introduction

The intricate fabric of Indian society is woven with the complex thread of gender-based discrimination that eventually result in subjugation of the marginalised sections and their consequent alienation. A peek at the archives narrates the tales of individual / group sufferings, societal expectations that produces uneven division of power and the often isolating effects of cultural norms which compels women to grapple with the power dynamics, prejudices and common stereotypes that have been existing against them since decades. Be it from the confines of traditional gender roles or to the alienation experienced because of the orthodox practices, women's experiences are marked by the struggle against oppression and the quest for autonomy and equality. It is quite apparent that gender roles, alienation and female subjugation emerge as the defining factors that shape not only women's encounters but writers' narratives as well. Therefore, alienation is the sense of estrangement which is deeply intertwined with the rigid constructs of gender roles followed by the systematic discrimination endured by women, which imposes restrictive norms and perpetuates inequalities that ultimately deny agency, autonomy and equal opportunities to women.

This chapter will therefore examine the interplay of the above mentioned factors, in order to trace the path of subjugation as portrayed in the selected texts and provide a glimpse of hope which is brought about by the resistance that women showcase as they realise their worth and try to dismantle oppressive structures and create a more just and equitable society.

2.2 Correlation between Gender Roles and Female Subjugation

Female oppression is the result of an interrelationship between a series of socio-cultural factors that have been evolving since centuries. These socio-cultural factors have toiled together for ages to build a well-established patriarchal society where women have always had to make do with the secondary position that they are provided with in all social, political, cultural and economic aspects of life. One of these socio-cultural factors is gender roles which constantly affects the status of women in a patriarchal setup ultimately leading to alienation. Gender has always been a dynamic and ever-changing social construct that directly affects the personal life, career choices and people's attitude towards an individual, as it is used by the society to denote the differences between men and women. Amy M. Blackstone, in her research paper "Gender Roles and Society" explores the perceptions on gender of one of the first social scientists Ann Oakley (1972) who differentiated between the concepts of gender and sex and says, "According to Oakley, gender parallels the biological division of sex into male and female, but it involves the division and social valuation of masculinity and femininity." (Blackstone 335).

Therefore, based on the biological and physical characteristics, men and women are discriminated by the society that they are a part of, hence creating a social division among themselves. Moreover, Md. Obaidullah Siam, in his research work entitled "Meaning and Definition of Gender: An Analysis", explores the origins and a series of definitions on gender given by various theorists and organisations. One of the definitions that the author explores is stated by the *World Health Organization* (WHO) which like Oakley, describes gender as characteristics of women and men that are socially constructed and that vary from society to society and therefore changes continuously. (Siam 5).

The above views and definitions on gender prove that gender is a socio-cultural construct and it refers to the categories of femininity and masculinity based on the biological distinction. The way society is not created by nature but by human beings themselves, in the same manner, gender too is not created by nature rather it is the society that creates it which further gives rise to the issues of gender conformity, gender roles and subjugation. Gender roles on the other hand refer to the roles and behaviours that a society expects to be fulfilled by an individual based on one's own gender. For example, women should behave in a ladylike manner, should look after the house, husband and children, should dress in socially accepted clothing, should be tolerant and are cowardly, emotional and weak. On the contrary, men have the freedom of speech, of making decisions for themselves and the family, freedom of pursuing the career they like and are supposed to be strong, brave, aggressive, capable, ambitious and dominant. In the article called "gender role" by Laura Payne, the author elaborates on the concept of gender role, its origins and its practices in different aspects of social life and defines the term gender role as: "a culturally and socially determined set of expected behaviours, attitudes and characteristics based on concepts of masculinity and femininity." She further explains the origins of the concept and says that it was a New Zealand American sexologist called John Money who coined the term 'gender role' in 1955 and defined it as "all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman" (Payne). Gender roles therefore are socially assigned complex set of restrictive norms that include the mannerisms, recreational preferences, division of work and responsibilities and culturally defined position in the society.

The never-ending practice of gender roles and the prevalence of male dominance has always undermined the position of women in Indian Society. Since ancient period

until today, women's roles and responsibilities have been as huge as the iceberg but have always been presented as the tip of the iceberg. Therefore, in order to study women's position in Indian society, one must study the status of women in ancient times as well as present day, as it enables the researcher to recognise the issues related with gender roles which were challenged by the Indian women authors of 19th and 20th century so as to empower the female community. It is thus necessary to understand the process that evolved the complex chain of gender roles over time. The ancient period, medieval period and British period plays a crucial role in this process.

The ancient period includes three periods namely, Matriarchy Period, Vedic Period and Post-Vedic period. During the Matriarchy period, women enjoyed the privilege of being treated equally to men and gained the central position in the society. The reason being that men were unaware of the process of reproduction and believed that creation involved women and earth, hence, considered themselves to be the subordinates of women. Also, Women played an important role in the survival of humans as they were the first ones to invent agriculture and also spearheaded the streams of martial arts, Ayurveda and statistical philosophy. This culture where women were at the forefront was called 'Anarya culture' during the time, which was entirely feminist in nature. Ironically, in this period, although women invented agriculture and geometry that are crucial for human survival, they were clubbed into Anarya culture which refers to "ignoble" according to 'Purana glossary' and technically stands for "the ethically inferior ones" according to 'Jainism glossary' as stated on the webpage of *Wisdom Library*. The idea of such a culture sheds light on the fact that even during the matriarchy period women were to some extent and through the usage of language were considered to be unworthy, uncivilized and inferior to men. Furthermore, with the emergence of Vedic period, there were improvements in the agricultural sector and as

men realized their place in the process of childbirth, the feminist culture came to an end and was replaced by a patriarchal society.

The arrival of Aryans in India marked the beginning of the Vedic period in which a patriarchal family system with some amount of male dominance had already been developed by the Aryan tribe. Nevertheless, women's roles provided them with a sense of freedom and respect and they had certain amount of control on the means of production because the labour was divided equally among both the sexes and which meant that both male and females owned their own territory of production. Along with equal responsibilities, the society adhered to the rule of co-educating boys and girls which made it possible for women to attain formal education and scholastic training. The status of women during this period could be considered satisfactory because with the advancements in economic and agricultural sector and with the replacement of hoe with a plough, women's participation in the production process and economic activity was terminated entirely and this resulted in man being the sole owner of the field, the plough and the yield and wealth produced. In the ruling Aryan class, the system of polygamy and dowry prevailed which further caused decline in the status of Aryan women. By then end of the period, giving girls off in early marriage gained considerable strength affecting women's education and freedom.

With the emergence of Post-Vedic period there was an increase in the restrictions, sufferings and hardships of women because the society started practicing the rules and norms as proposed by Manu in *Manusmriti* which states that a daughter should be under the surveillance of her during childhood, under her husband's surveillance after marriage and as a mother she should be under the surveillance of her son. During this period male dominance developed and the drastic decline in women's education and the practice of pre-puberty marriage of girls came into full force. With Manu's proposed

norms and restrictions, female chastity and set consequences of adultery were given utter importance. The concept of strict monogamous marriage came into existence, however it should not be surprising when one realises that the rule of monogamous marriage applied to women only as men did not adhere to it. Also, the consequences of adultery were strictly women-oriented as the lawmakers were not strict with men. Sophie M. Tharakan and Michael Tharakan rightly quote Percival Spear and Engels' observation in their research paper titled "Status of Women in India: A Historical Perspective", and say:

As Percival Spear points out, while monogamy was generally practiced there were conspicuous exceptions in the case of Brahmins, Rajas and higher nobles. The general observation by Engels in his *Origin of Family* that monogamous marriage means monogamy only for woman and not for man who still practices practically polygamy, seems to be applicable to India (Tharakan and Tharakan 119).

Thus by the end of the ancient period, women had suffered drastic hardships at the hands of a male dominant society which in the medieval period deteriorates even further.

The medieval period in Indian history witnessed the advent of Muslim rulers who with their own set of beliefs, rules and regulations restricted the social movement of women in India and oppressed them in every possible sphere. In this period, the roles of women were highly constrained within the domestic sphere. Various Koranic interpretations resulted in the then prevailing norms of the women's roles in the society and women were confined to the four walls of their houses. Furthermore they were denied any kind of participation in legal as well as religious affairs and were also not allowed to enjoy property inheritance rights. It was in this period that women had to

suffer many social evils like Purdah system, *zenana* system, female infanticide, prohibition of widow remarriage, sati system, re-emergence of polygamy, unilateral right of divorce for men, dowry system and obligatory enforcement of child marriages. Also, during the medieval period, women were completely denied education. Therefore, women now were not only economically dependent on their male counterparts, but were also socially reliant on them as their actions were controlled by the males.

During the initial period of British India, the colonizers in hopes of gaining benefit from colonized Indians, educated them. This indirectly helped some of the Indians attain western education which in-turn introduced them to the concepts of equality, freedom, liberty and fraternity. Having acquired education, some of the Indians emphasized equal treatment of women with that of men. This situation forced the British government to take some important steps to reform the Indian social order. And hence, the major two movements that took place during this period were the Social Reforms Movement and the Nationalist Movement which are analysed in the research methodology section of chapter 1. As both these movements emerged during the 19th and 20th century, the period during which the selected texts were written and published, one can see the portrayal of ‘resistance’ and a glimpse of ‘hope’ for a fully developed India where women are somewhat empowered and free from all sorts of subjugation and oppression.

The roles of women have been under constant change during the various periods of Indian history as explored above and the change in these roles has also contributed to the change in the practices that led to female oppression. Therefore, it is clearly evident that there is a correlation between gender roles and female subjugation and that the former perpetually influences the latter. Gender roles therefore need to be studied thoroughly in order to understand the never-ending passage of female subjugation.

2.3 Subjugation: A Pathway to Alienation

The concept that describes the feelings of isolation, disconnection, estrangement from oneself and from others is called alienation. It is studied in various fields such as psychology, sociology and philosophy and refers to the feelings of being separated from one's true self, from relationships and from communities. This feeling of alienation mostly leads to emptiness, emotional distress, loneliness and lack of belonging. It is associated with feelings of powerlessness, disconnection, and a lack of control over one's life circumstances in the field of psychology. It has also been examined by various thinkers, one among which is Karl Marx and philosophers like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre whose works deal with the theme of alienation as they explore their characters' struggle to find meaning in an absurd world. According to Marxist theory of alienation, capitalism plays a vital role in alienating individuals from their fellow workers, the products of their labour and from their own human essence. Tamara Marček in her Master's thesis *Alienation, Isolation and Re-establishment of Identity in British Modernist Novels* describes alienation as "an umbrella concept that includes ... powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, cultural estrangement, and self-estrangement." (Marček 7).

In *Padmarag* and *Kamala: A Story of Hindu life*, the authors have constructed such complex characters that their lack of personal identity, belonging as well as alienness is as apparent as their oppression within both the private and public spheres. The private memories and experiences of the women characters in both the novels often alienate them from the people in their surroundings and from themselves. In *Padmarag*, the alienation of the women becomes clear when we see the women's hard hearted external appearance melting down during the revelation sessions wherein each member of the Bhavan opens up to the others. But before these revelations, what grabs the

reader's attention is the way in which their past memories surface and crowd the women's minds driving them into space where they become as unfeeling as a stone, concealing their true self from the society and in the process feeling alienated. Siddika, the protagonist's alienation is revealed when Latif comments on her personality several times saying, "She is as unfeeling as an idol carved from stone" or when he comments on the name given to her by Dina-Tarini and says "The name is appropriate as far as her beauty is concerned; but one hopes that her nature is devoid of the hard, stony quality of a padmarag, a ruby." (Hossain 60, 109). Similarly, Saudamini, Rafika and Helene, having suffered oppression at their marital house as well as in their own family, are seen lapsing into alienation where they are detached and dissociated from the outside world and allow their memories inflict pain and alienation upon them.

In *Kamala*, Kamala feels separated from her world of innocence and unconditional love of Narayan after her marriage. At Ganesh's Place as well, she is often left out from the family's affairs, is made worthless because of which she questions her existence at every point and feels estranged and isolated. An instance when her alienation is revealed is when she visits a temple along with her family and gets lost amidst the crowd and lapsing into her past where she visualises scenes that she is unaware of and upon coming back to her senses she feels separated from the society, and a sense of powerlessness and loneliness overcomes her. Also having lived in an unhealthy environment after marriage where the walls narrated the stories of heartbreaks and internal cries, she gets immersed in the bad memories so much so that it affects her health extremely and drives her to madness. Other characters like Bhagirathi also live a similar life of isolation and disconnection. Bhagirathi does not feel alienated from herself but also from her mother and the society. When she tries to liberate herself from her husband's cruelty and goes back to her mother's place to seek

refuge, she is demeaned by her own mother for having thought about divorce and is sent back to the same hell that she has been trying to escape. Like her mother, other women from the community degrade and humiliate her for her decisions and alienate her from the social affairs of the community.

In *Kaavya Phule*, Savitribai explores the alienation of women and of the lower castes from the public sphere and socio-cultural practices. In some of her poems she portrays the objectification of women and their slavery that makes their lives meaningless to them, while in the others she examines the estrangement of the Shudras and the Dalits. An example of how objectification leads to alienation she explains through the poem “Yellow Chafa”, in which she narrates the tale of a beautiful flower which is glorified, gazed at and utilized by the world; but once taken and used, it is forsaken, isolated and left to wither away and die as a result of its lack of control over its life circumstances.

In the last text, i.e. *Sultana's Dream*, Hossain creates a utopia where the gender norms and restrictions are reversed and instead of women, men are isolated and alienated. This is done to reveal the kind of estrangement the women in purdah experience which restricts their movement both mentally and physically. It ultimately builds a wall around the women's personality and alienate them from other people. Nonetheless, by creating an utopia, the author challenges this process of alienation which is a result of discrimination, suppression and the wrongs done to women which affect their lives severely.

2.4 Exploring Gender Roles, Female Subjugation and Resistance in the Selected Texts with Suitable Examples

2.4.1 *Kaavya Phule*

Among the series of literary genres, poetry alone has the potential to evoke awareness and essential emotional response in the readers with the help of as much less words as possible, yet it is also the genre that is less read and less appreciated by the common masses. Even in the ongoing century, if observed carefully, one realises that it is studied only when an individual is compelled to comprehend and interpret it in order to advance their academic or professional careers. But in the 19th century perhaps the status of poetry was not as low, specifically among the Marathi speaking population, because Savitribai Phule did not only make her place in the list of renowned social reformers, but also created some significant literary works and one among them is her well-known but under-researched poetry collection called *Kaavya Phule* that speaks volumes in terms of social awareness even today. Her poetry collection is her way of resistance towards all the conventional and social boundaries that women are expected to adhere to and it also encourages the female community to realise their self-worth and self-importance by creating awareness about the gender roles that they abide by which ultimately lead to their subjugation.

Along with being the pioneer of India's feminist movement, she is also given the title of being the first modern, radical Marathi poet, whose poems raise the voice of all the newly – emerging Indian women who demanded to be treated humanely. Because of this she was hailed by the names like *Krantijyoti* and *Jananajyoti* which meant 'Flame of Revolution' and 'Flame of Education' respectively. However she has not received much attention and appreciation from a huge lot of India's population for her literary works. The reason for this has been explained by Archana Malik-Goure when she quotes Braj Ranjan Mani, who rightly states that "Savitribai Phule struggled and suffered with her revolutionary husband in an equal measure, but remains obscured due

to casteist and sexist negligence” (Malik-Goure 34). Yet one must realise that it was Savitribai Phule who during the time when women had little to no hope and had to live a life of servitude to their husbands and households; that she relentlessly spearheaded the movement of resistance in the 19th century with the publication of her work *Kaavya Phule* in 1854, wherein she strives to abolish discrimination of people on the basis of gender and caste. These issues are addressed in several of her poems and one such poem is poem no. 37 entitled ‘Can he be called human?’, wherein she demeans the male-dominance and the patriarchal setup of India and says, “He isn’t ashamed of his beastly ways / he considers them his joys, / he acts like a barbarian; / can he be called human?” (lines 34 – 37). In the same poem, she explores the concerns of complex gender roles where a woman works at length and has to sacrifice herself in the process; while the man, unbothered, wastes days and months leisurely doing nothing. Savitribai says, “The wife keeps working / and the freeloader keeps eating. / ... / His destitute household / bares its poverty, / ... / He doesn’t read or write, / nor does he take counsel. /... / can he be called human?” (lines 21 – 33).

The poet explores the normalization of women’s association with domestic responsibilities, where neither the men of the household nor the community that the men belongs to, find this normalisation problematic conclusively contributing to women’s oppression. Dr. Ramesh H. Patil in his research article “The Social Status of Indian Women of Different Periods in the Patriarchal Society” explains this negligence of Indian patriarchal society where women do not have the same rights and position as men, by stating, “‘*Chool and Mool*’, ‘*Muki Bichari- Kunihi Haka*’”. In simpler terms, this means that a woman is bound by the burden of cooking, cleaning, looking after the children and serving the husband as one serves God; and because she conforms to one of the two genders i.e. female, she does not have the right to speak up for herself nor is

she considered a human and hence is treated like a cow, a domestic labourer who works relentlessly, yet does not charge wages round the year.

Along with the division of labour, gender roles also define the moral conduct and the “ideal” behaviour that a woman has to comply with. Manu had already sowed the seed of an ideal moral conduct, supposed to be followed by the women during the post-Vedic period which never died out; rather it bloomed into such a vicious tree that over the centuries spread its roots in the entire geographical area of India. So the women were taught the importance of chastity from a very early stage of their development and unsurprisingly, this special knowledge was never transformed to the men of the country and hence they had the privilege of practicing polygamy which added to their already colossal list of rights and freedom. Just like Sita, the daughter of the earth, an ideal wife and woman; from *Ramayana*, who had to undergo “Agni-Pariksha” in order to prove her purity to Ram, all the women on the day of their wedding have to go through the same in order to prove their morality and virtuousness. In the poem no. 19 entitled “The butterfly and the flower bud”, the poet addresses this attitude towards women which is motivated by all the members of various community. She questions women’s practice of chastity and monogamy and men’s ignorance and freedom to practice polygamy. The butterfly in the poem represents the male section while the flower represents the female section of the general public. The poet explores the liberty that men enjoy in the civilization of having to do everything as per their will, while women on the other hand because of their orthodox conditioning, think of settling down by getting married.

In the first stanza, the poet says “The handsome butterfly ... / spoke volumes through his laughter. / His wings of silk, covered with spots, / big and small ... / his crooked legs took sudden flights” (lines 1 – 7). This explains men’s control over right

of speech and expression and also their right to decision making, which fill their life with joy, laughter and delight. The poet in the second stanza explores the orthodox conditioning where the future of women was restricted to marital goals and marital house, as they were unable to realise the importance of self-reliance, self-worth and independence. She says “She saw him, and lost herself: / ... she chose to be his lover. / She affectionately ... waited for him to come forth.” (lines 9 – 14). In the last two stanzas, the poet goes on to explore the consequences of such a conditioning and parenting methods. The last two stanzas are as follows:

The butterfly leaped to her / and sat delightedly. / The overwhelmed, honey-filled flower / clung to him passionately. / Her beauty aroused him; / she was helpless in his presence. / He sought her nectar, / and left her withered. (lines 17 – 24).

Having had a taste, he pushed her away; / now he refused to even look at her / He cast her aside, left her for another. / He felt no shame. / Who was this flower bud? / He forgot the old, embraced the new: / the way of the world is fickle. / I see; I am astonished.” (lines 25 – 32).

Here, the poet explains the cruel patriarchal setup which do not harm men in any way. Since childhood, women are taught that the husband is the whole and sole of their being and therefore must sacrifice themselves entirely, giving up their freedom. As described by the poet, they clung to their “trustworthy” husbands passionately and serve them unconditionally throughout their lives which transforms their identity from being independent to dependent in all the aspects of life, be it physically, socially or economically. As a result, men use and condition women in the manner they believe is suitable for them and once they are successful in ruining the women both physically and economically, they are left withered in a literal sense. Now it is the duty of women to practice monogamy while the husbands go round the world practicing polygamy and

simultaneously ruining all other women that they come in contact with. This is why Savitribai Phule poses women's question of "Who was this flower bud?" and the answer to this is that it is women who were and are unknowingly ignorant, yet innocent and are trampled upon by the fickle way of the world. The poem also answers the question of 'Whether monogamy and the consequences of adultery are applicable only to women?'; it is undoubtedly evident through the poet's attempt in creating such a work, that yes it is applicable only to women because until and unless the women resist such absurd expectations of the society and unless they learn to express their objection towards it, the inhumanely rule will be exclusively imposed on the women who endure subjugation and the men will be proud of their 'big and small spots' that represent their ill-treatment, misconduct and transgressions as described by the poet in the first stanza of the poem.

Nevertheless, Savitribai also explores the support that is needed in order for any being to resist oppression or wrong doings directed towards them. The poet narrates her own lived experience of how she gained the much needed support from her husband Jyotirao Phule, in poem no. 9 to which she has given the title "Jyotiba's awakening", where she illustrates how her husband's speech's motivated and supported her to such an extent that she followed his path of serving the marginalised section of the civilisation.

She further goes on to advise women in the latter half of her poems and one such poem that creates awareness and urges the women to realise their worth and speak up for themselves is poem no. 34 entitled "Wake up to learn", where Savitribai says, "We shall educate our children. / We too shall learn. / With knowledge shall we gain wisdom / and righteousness." (lines 13 – 16). "For the needful to learn, / they must awaken and fight. / Break the legacy of shackles, / wake up, to educate yourself!" (lines 27 – 30). Here, educating oneself has both literal and metaphorical meanings. Firstly, women

must gain proper education so as to attain independence in all aspects and secondly, they must recognise and oppose the abuse and mistreatment that they or their counterparts are subjected to; because if one does not have the courage and power over oneself, the person can in no way see the change that they want to. Therefore, Mary Wollstonecraft rightly says, “I do not wish women to have power over men; but over themselves”. Savitribai too extends the same thought of resistance and consciousness through her poems.

2.4.2 *Padmarag* and *Sultana's Dream*

a) *Padmarag*

Hossain's novel *Padmarag* is a strong creation that emphasizes the importance of resistance in a patriarchal authoritative society. She enables the women of India to hope and strive for a better future where they are not restricted to the confines of their homes, rather where they enjoy the liberty to act as per their will and to work for themselves which will eventually add in to their better standards of living. This is to say that women must believe in Ernst Bloch's principle of hope which states, “Individuals are unfinished, they are hopeful of a better life” (Banerjee, Maumita, et al. 32). *Padmarag* is a tale of a female community where women are the captains of their own ships and it is also enriched with some autobiographical elements. Rokeya in this novel creates a harmonious female community who belong to different religions, castes and classes yet carry out their professional, personal and social tasks amicably. Therefore, in her “Letter of Dedication” to her brother she writes: “Brother: I dedicate to you the portrait I have painted during my leisure hours. It is my first composition, born out of my very first efforts. My composition has not adhered to social norms.” (Hossain). Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was one of the early 20th century writers who did not only observe the miseries faced by women but also had the courage to pen down their wretched

condition in the society. In her speech delivered at “Bengal Women’s Educational Conference” she addresses the issues of negligence, ignorance and obliviousness of Indians as she says:

I have been crying for the lowliest creature in India for the last twenty years. Do you know who that lowliest creature in India is? It is the Indian women . . . There are people also who feel for animals, so we see animals’ rights groups everywhere. If a dog is hit by a car, we hear an outcry in the Anglo-Indian media. But there is not a single soul in the whole of the subcontinent to mourn for incarcerated women like us (Mahmud 42).

This ignorance leads to the prevailing gender-roles which in turn lead to female subjugation as can be seen through the lives of women characters in *Padmarag*. The very titular character Padmarag, also called Siddika or Zainab is subjected to the upbringing carried about by keeping in mind the gender roles. Although she belonged to a upper-class, well-to-do family and although her brother educated her, she finds it difficult to help the sisters at Tarini Bhavan in completing everyday tasks and also to use her skills to generate income. Although she had acquired expertise in fine embroidery, knitting and language skills, the kind of skills that zamindars’ daughters were taught, they were literally of no use in any way as neither was she taught mathematics nor did she have little knowledge of sewing everyday clothes, making it unsuitable for her to generate a decent income in order to earn her living. The author here, raises the normalised issue of imparting formal education without giving it a thought of whether or not it is going to be useful in the future. She thus tries to integrate formal education of women with such a training that will empower them and the society. She further goes on to explore the complexity of these gendered norms that result in females experiencing oppression to a large extent by giving us an insight into Saudamini

and Helene's past. Saudamini, the daughter of a *Kulin* Brahmin is married off to a widower by her stepmother at the age of seventeen. After the wedding ceremony, she is advised by her mother to take good care of her husband and his children Nagendra and Jahnavi. Moreover, when she enters her husband's house, she is welcomed with poisonous insults like, 'From now on, Nagendra and Jahnavi won't be treated like family', 'Now they have been robbed of a father as well' and 'Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, has forsaken us; in her place, a witch has installed herself'; by the very people of her husband's family and the neighbours who were invited for the welcome ceremony. Further on her sisters-in-law, her step children and their aunt Shyama start conspiring against her and accuse her not only of treating the children badly, but also of attempting to kill Nagendra and Jahnavi. This turns her mother-in-law and husband against her as they begin to treat her indifferently and cruelly and at this point she realises that "the step relationship is a dangerous one. The world is ready to crucify a stepmother for the same gesture that would be perfectly acceptable in a mother." (Hossain 77). Having endured such intense pain and hurt, her heart cries out in anguish and she wonders aloud:

Day and night, I think, how will the days go by

In this abode of demons, in this desert?

Here, there is no soothing shade, no sympathy for others' pain,

How, alas, shall I spend my days in this prison? (Hossain 78).

Helene's story depicts how she trusted a man and how she was betrayed by the same man that she loved dearly and with whom she wished to live happily. Having known Joseph Horace for three years she marries him in the hopes of leading a peaceful life. But as their relationship progressed she learnt that trusting someone completely can have utter consequences too. By the second year of their marriage, Joseph transforms

into a drunkard and would return home completely drunk and subjugate Helene to his everyday abuse, beatings and wrath. The physical and mental torture scared her deeply, yet she tried to maintain her relation as a result of having brought up with ethical and social norms. After she learnt that Joseph is a murderer, Helene lodged a complaint against him and files out a divorce but the law of England does not grant it to her on the basis that she does not have a valid reason for the same. Helene is hence tied up to the lunatic for life and the court of England does not have much to say or do about it except for the following impractical words:

Certainly, your sympathy will be this with this unfortunate sacrifice to our marriage laws ... It is most unfortunate, that this poor woman should remain tied for life to a cruel, tyrannical, insane murderer. Many will consider our legal system to be harsh and inhuman – but this is the law of England. Any redressal in a case like this lies beyond the scope of law. (Hossain 96).

Through Helene's experience it is evident that gendered norms are practised all over the world, irrespective of which caste, class or race a person belongs to. Rokeya through these narrations, explores the complexity of self-sacrifice that is taught by the society to girls alone. Usha, further in the novel, problematizes this sacrificing principle and says:

A woman is taught the principle of self-sacrifice from birth. When she is a spinster, she sacrifices her own interests for the sake of her father and her brothers. When she marries, her husband's needs take precedence. And finally, she sacrifices her own needs to those of her children. The self-sacrifice of certain women remains confined to domestic life; that of others encompasses the whole world. (Hossain 118).

Further, the author, most importantly highlights how the characters resist and manage to find a glimpse of hope in Tarini Bhavan and improve their tomorrow. Tarini Bhavan is an organization established and run by Dina-Tarini Sen, a widow of a distinguished lawyer, belonging to a rich family. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain has fictionalised her life and experiences in the character of Dina-Tarini Sen, enriching the novel with numerous autobiographical elements. Like Rokeya, Dina – Tarini too suffers the torment of widowhood and was deprived of a dignified position in her own household. Nevertheless, upon reading the life of her fictionalised character Dina-Tarini, the change brought about by her in the community through their various valiant deeds becomes apparent. Dina-Tarini, having suffered severe pain and mistreatment decides to retaliate and begins her social reform movement by going against her family who scorn her for her various activities and are unhappy to see her use all her wealth for helping others. She founds ‘Tarini Bhavan’, a home for widows and upon its success, she further establishes a school for girls, a society that helps the marginalized women which she called ‘Society for the Upliftment of Downtrodden Women’ and also established a ‘Home for the Ailing and the Needy’. These establishments allowed her to give refuge to the widows of all sections of the society, irrespective of their religion or caste; to educate the girls, be they orphan or from a low-class family and to provide for the wives who left their marital house for good because of their husbands brutality. Her ambition was to educate the female community in such a way that they become self-reliant and not lifeless puppets or burdens on their fathers, brothers, husbands or sons.

One of the sisters of Tarini Bhavan, Sakina, now a civil surgeon, becomes an epitome of resistance when she refuses to go back to her coward husband’s house. Her tragic tale goes back to when she was fifteen years old and was married off to a drunkard

with immoral habits named Abdul Gafur. After the completion of the marriage ceremony, the bride and groom were asked to perform the ritual involving the couple's first look at each other's faces. But Abdul Gafur humiliates Sakina by refusing to perform the ritual because his mistress maid claimed that the bride was ugly. Furthermore he disappears with Sakina's jewellery and marries some other lady who is certified to be beautiful by his maid. Having endured such humiliation, Sakina does not enter her marital house and when nearly three years later Abdul Gafur in order to be forgiven for having stolen the jewellery proposes the deal to bring back his bride, Sakina refuses to be his wife in a letter that she delivered to Abdul Gafur. The letter had the following pearls of resistance:

It was not my intention to hurt you. But the bitter truth is this: it is impossible for us to share a life together. Had it slipped your mind that you had spurned me on the say-so of a maid? It seemed that she whom your Bela certified as "bootifool" would be deemed "bootifool"! I could not be "promoted" to the status of a wife because she had refused to issue me a certificate for being "bootifool". To this day, I have not been able to forget that humiliation – in my opinion, the humiliation of all womankind. That is all I have to convey. (Hossain 99 – 100).

Therefore, in the present day, she rightly owns her beliefs and shares it with her fellow sisters and says:

The essence of a woman's life does not lie in keeping house for her husband. A human life is a most valuable gift from God – it is not something to be wasted by merely devoting yourself to keeping the home fires burning. We have to declare war on society.

To which Rafiya Begum, a typist replies: "... We must smash the core of this custom of seclusion. It is the root cause of all evil! No more putting up with abuse to preserve the dignity of seclusion!" (Hossain 104 – 105).

b) *Sultana's Dream*

Although *Sultana's Dream* is as short as a short story, it is not less than a well-structured novel. Perhaps, this is the reason why it was published again in book form in the year 1908. The author in this text criticizes the 'purdah system' which the Hindu and Muslim women are compelled to follow. 'Purdah' meaning curtain, has been a central feature that added to the miseries of women, as it not only limited their movement within their home and interaction with men outside their homes, but also limited their interactions with males of their family also. When one reads through the pages of history, the origin of such a binding system becomes apparent. The system is believed to have originated in the Persian culture which was later adopted by the Muslims. When India went through the pain of being colonized by various dynasties, one of the colonizers who expanded their beliefs, rituals and practices to India, were the Muslims. With the emergence and spread of Islamic ideals, their highly restrictive purdah system took its peak as the Hindu community acquired and imposed it on their women. The men therefore oppressed the women by confining them to their houses and it further resulted in women's seclusion from several public practices.

This very custom of seclusion is criticized and problematized by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in *Sultana's Dream*; and along with criticizing it, she also provides us an insight into an utopian world where the gender roles are reversed. In 'Ladyland', the dream land of Sultana, the protagonist witnesses a world where no woman is excluded from the social and political practices, and no woman is confined to the 'zenana'. Rather, the narrative encourages all the women out there to embrace their

physical and emotional weaknesses and to believe that they are capable of performing all the roles that are assigned to men as flawlessly as they perform their domestic roles. Sultana dreams of Ladyland, where she is greeted by her dear friend Sister Sara who brief her about the socio-political scenario of Ladyland. In her dream they decide to take a walk on the streets and we see Sultana feeling self-conscious because being a woman she was not used to walking in the streets during daytime. When confronted by Sister Sara she says in an apologizing tone, “as being a purdahnishin woman I am not accustomed to walking about unveiled.” (Hossain 3). But to Sultana’s surprise, she notices that there was not even a single man on the street, rather she came across many women walking on the streets unveiled. When she raises her doubt and asks Sister Sara about such a strange practice, she is told that the men are shut in the ‘mardanas’ just the way women were shut since history. Rokeya therefore, represents the suffocating zenana where women could hardly breathe the air of freedom and subverts the practice altogether by shutting the men in, so that men realise the amount of agony women endure silently.

However, having raised up with the belief that world is not a safer place for women, therefore they must remain indoors and handle the house, Sultana finds it difficult to absorb such information and out of curiosity she says to Sister Sara, “Why? It is not safe for us to come out of the zenana, as we are naturally weak.” Sultana further goes on to explain the all-pervading gender biases and gender roles in India, as she thinks it is impossible for women to handle social affairs because, “we have no hand or voice in the management of our social affairs. In India, man is lord and master.” (Hossain 5). Through this narrative, Hossain thus prompts the readers to recognise the harm, traditional parenting methods are causing women. The author turns all the stones upside down and paints such a productive society governed by women that the narrative

screams out the term ‘resistance’, and educates the general masses that women should not be subjected to violation, because when ‘we’ the women start empowering ourselves no man will ever be visible outdoors. Not only this, but by portraying a women-dominated society, she spreads out awareness and informs the women all across, that they can overcome their fear and shatter the shackles of gender-roles and gender-bias only if they resist and strive to acquire equality and their deserved equal position in all the sectors of life. Thus, the vision that Sultana dreams of, not only subverts the patriarchal norms and socially-constructed ideas but also establishes the fact that male-dominance can be resisted both on symbolic and literal levels.

2.4.3 *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*

Krupabai Satthianadhan narrates the story of how the bangles, mangalsutra, toe rings, sindoor, etc. the presumed symbols of marriage transform into shackles for women, which cannot be casted off easily. Krupabai also examines the traditional upbringing of girls in rural as well as urban areas that prevailed during the period, and that still prevails in some parts of the country. Her efforts to emancipate the oppressed section of the society is evident in all her works be it her essays or novels, and the same could be witnessed in *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* as well. Having observed the distress and anguish of women she was surrounded with, she dedicated her life towards liberating the women from the clutches of tradition and patriarchy and therefore we now know her as one of the most prominent social reformers. Her passion for educating the women and empowering them could be understood when one goes through her essays, in which she redeems the decadent customs, superstitions and the dangers of a patriarchal society and exposes the possibility of having a healthier society for women, as in one of her essays entitled “Female Education”, she writes:

How much fuller brighter and healthier the life of our girls would be if they could only throw off the trammels of superstition and prejudice and breathe the healthy atmosphere of innocent enjoyment and culture! Pandita Ramabai's work is national in its effects, for the widows she is training are sure to take lead in the emancipation of the woman of India. (Mund).

She was highly inspired by Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati, an Indian social reformer who objected the degraded position of women in Indian society and worked towards promoting women's education and deliverance from the oppression of child marriage by establishing a school for child widows and by rejecting the teachings of sacred epics, dharma shastras, and the puranic verses which taught the readers that women were worse than demons and as unholy as untruth. This influence added to Krupabai's own resolve to improve the surrounding and transform the unhealthy society into a productive and an equitable one. Thus, the determination and resolve is apparent in her novel *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*, as we see her weaving all the gender roles and social evils together into a ruthless garland that is expected to be preserved by the women; and hence shooting questions at the readers in every single chapter.

The very first and second chapter introduces the rigid domestic roles assigned to girls from an early age as we see Kamala's grandmother chiding her father for having raised Kamala like a boy by providing independence and freedom to live her childhood to the fullest. Girls from a very early age are taught all the domestic chores but are deprived even the basic education, when logically the scenario should have been vice-versa. According to the traditional parenting methods, both boys and girls are taught that the main responsibility of a girl or a woman is housework and bringing up children, while the boys get the opportunity to acquire education and have the privilege of choosing their career. This scenario of 19th and early 20th century is vividly portrayed

by the director Ketan Mehta, in his movie titled “Mirch Masala”, released in the year 1987. In the movie, the Mukhiya’s wife Saraswati, who belongs to an upper-caste family, wishes to educate her little daughter by sending her to the village school. However, the news spreads like wildfire throughout the village and reaches the Mukhiya, who gets so furious upon hearing the news that he stomps to the school and drags his daughter back home. Furthermore, he disdains Saraswati for letting the thought occur in her mind and warns her to teach “her” daughter domestic chores as that will be her duty after she’s married off.

Similarly, at the beginning of the second chapter of Krupabai’s novel as well, the prevalence of these gender roles is portrayed by the author prominently as the chapter begins with:

A group of little girls are seen at a well in the back-yard of Kashinath Punt’s house in the city. Their brass pots are laid down on the stony pavement that surrounds the well. There is apparently an animated conversation going on, and the gestures of the girls indicate suppressed excitement. (Sathianadhan 12).

The above description reveals the “this is what we must do” attitude ingrained in the children from their childhood. The little girls seem to be so accustomed to their domestic sphere that they are heedless of the wrongs done to them, hence they carry on with their lives and the so called ‘sexual divided labour’. The next gender-role explored and criticized by the author is ‘negligence’. Never will any reader hear from a woman during the 19th and 20th century that they were given a choice of choosing their “husbands”, rather one will hear endless tales of how the consent of a woman was never asked when the question of her marriage was raised. The women then were simply informed about when the wedding was going to be held and who her husband and in-laws were. Similarly, Kamala, the protagonist of the novel, was never given a choice to

choose her husband neither did she have any say in it; because one fine day, out of the blue, her sanyasi father Narayan informs her that she is to be married soon and that after her wedding she will have to look after herself. Narayan discloses his hearts secret to Kamala: “You are to be married”, he said, “and I can’t help it. It was arranged some time ago. The visitors came to see you more than me... Your father-in-law to be is a *pundit* well known to me. His wife was here this evening. Are you satisfied, my little girl?” (Saththianadhan 17). Ironically, a man, the head of the family claims to be incapable of stopping this absurd course of events that are being furthered by his very agreement and yet he has the courtesy to ask his daughter of whether or not she is satisfied, when in the first place she was totally unaware of the course of decisions being taken for her. At the same time, one must appreciate Krupabai’s attempts in portraying the patriarchal setting where an Indian girl is prepared for the marriage by her elders even before she is able to comprehend the real meaning of such an event and the burden of responsibilities she is will be enduring in the future; because instead of retaliating her father’s decision, we are informed about her supposedly “unspoken” consent to the marriage when Saththianadhan writes, “The idea of marriage was not unfamiliar to kamala. She knew she was to be married some-day, for the old woman had often said that it was high time she was married, and had grumbled over and over again at the delay...” (*Kamala* 17). Moreover, her father further goes on to say, “You must go and be like other girls, toil for your own food and be at the mercy of others.” (Saththianadhan 17); which reveals that although Narayan is aware of the grim circumstances that Kamala will have to undergo, he stays firm on his decision and marries her off to be at the mercy of her husband and his family.

The author further illustrates and condemns the ‘principle of tolerance’. Being born a woman means that she is expected to inculcate the values of tolerance, self-

sacrifice and nurturing, since she is considered to be emotionally and physically weak. So in order to survive in their marital households, women are supposed to tolerate and bare the wrath of their husbands and in-laws. Kamala in the third chapter narrates the fate of her Shudra friend Yeshi's mother. Yeshi's mother's lived experience makes the readers rethink the credibility of sexually divided labour among the genders, where a husband proudly takes the responsibility of earning the livelihood for his family. Because in Yeshi's mother's case the situation is quite worse. Her husband does not work nor earns their livelihood, yet asks for food on time and when he doesn't receive it, he would mercilessly thrash the mother and daughter. Kamala therefore informs the reader:

He did not work, though in the evening he demanded the best of food. It was the duty of Yeshi's mother to get him his *curry* in the evenings, and when it was not forthcoming she received a beating from him, which, however, she took in a very cool matter-of-fact way. Sometimes Yeshi's face also would swell up suspiciously, and when asked the reason, she would answer, with a broad smile, "Oh! It is nothing. Father did not get his *curry* and I had a share in mother's beating. (Saththianadhan 24).

The gender roles are apparent as we see the author using the words like "he demanded", "duty of Yeshi's mother", "matter-of-fact way", "it is nothing" and "share in mother's beating". Furthermore, Yeshi's mother's miseries help us understand how the generalised gender-roles subject women to oppression, physical and mental abuse, and yet it is normalised to such an extent that the women themselves do not find it problematic and endure it in a matter-of-fact manner.

Although Krupabai Saththianadhan portrays these socially constructed norms and gendered behaviours and norms, she also painted strong women characters who resisted

subjugation and maintained their self-respect by going against the patriarchal domination. One such example is Bhagirathi. She is an educated girl married to an illiterate man belonging to a wealthy family who humiliated her at every possible moment and ridiculed her learning, in order to satisfy his male ego and to take delight seeing her spirit break with every humiliation. In order to maintain his male-dominance in the household, he goes on a mile further in subjugating Bhagirathi, when he brings back home another lady with whom he was having an affair. Thus Bhagirathi having suffered terrible persecution at the hands of her husband, flings her marital jewellery at her husband, shatters the bangles on her wrists which were the symbols of her marriage and leaves his house.

To conclude, all the three authors have created awareness immensely and have through their works taught the female community the need for resistance, and the need to believe and to stand up for themselves in order to make India an egalitarian country in all aspects. Furthermore, they have also emphasised the importance of female education in order to liberate the female community, in their works immensely and therefore the forthcoming chapter will cover an in-depth analysis of the same.

CHAPTER THREE

A STEP TOWARDS EMANCIPATION: ANALYSING THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will delve into the web of societal and hierarchical structures and ideologies that have been serving as the base of human civilization since ages. Although with time people's ideologies are evolving, yet the deep-rooted systems still influence the minds and attitudes of the dominant part of the society whose consequences are unfortunately to be faced by the disempowered segment. As stated in the preceding chapter, female subjugation has always been a result of the interplay between various social factors that cause discrimination; and so apart from the gender roles and alienation analysed in the previous chapter; patriarchy, religion, caste and class are also some of the other factors that undoubtedly contribute immensely towards female oppression. Patriarchy has been the root cause for gender biases which are deeply ingrained in cultural norms, institutions and traditional practices creating inequalities in family circles as well as socio-cultural dynamics. It helps the oppressors in perpetuating harmful stereotypes and limiting women to the domestic sphere. Religion, caste and class too are closely impacted by the patriarchal domination, as these factors too equally merge together creating a vicious web of misogyny. As religion is intertwined with cultural beliefs, it justifies patriarchal norms and restrictions on women's autonomy based on various interpretations of religious myths and scriptures. On the other hand, caste and class is the stratification of humans based on one's birth in a particular family and economic stability respectively. These coincide with each other collectively functioning to exploit and abuse the vulnerable women and people belonging to lower socio-economic backgrounds. All the above factors act as structural barriers that women

face in achieving equality and empowerment and therefore need to be studied in order to better understand female subjugation. At the same time these barriers could be overcome by promoting education which is done by the selected authors in their works. Therefore, the women writers not only examine the factors leading to female subjugation, but also explore the significant role of education in female empowerment.

3.2 Ceaseless Era of Patriarchal Regime as Portrayed in the Selected Texts

Virginia Woolf, one of the foremost English modernist literary figure of twentieth century, once said, “For most of history, anonymous was a woman”; and an in-depth interpretation of this thought leads one to the very reason of its origins that is ‘patriarchy’. The noun ‘patriarchy’ is derived from the Greek term called *patriarkhēs*, which means “father or chief of a race”, and was used to describe the dictatorial rule by the male head of the family. It has been well-researched by numerous scientists and theorists and therefore has several definitions that keep on evolving. One such definition is by Alda Facio, that is provided in her research entitled “What is Patriarchy”, where she understands definitions and various elements of patriarchy given in dictionaries and by some theorists and creates her own definition of the same by combining all these elements. She defines patriarchy as an organization or structuring of society that is produced by different institutions and includes the set of practices, mechanisms, myths and relationships that are encouraged by the society in order to maintain the domination of men over women through the system of exclusion and oppression (Facio, 2013). Patriarchy therefore refers to a system where male power / male prejudice against women is dominant and where men are the important and authoritative figures in all the areas. M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham in the tenth edition of “A Glossary of Literary Terms”, describe the patriarchal society as “it is male-centered and –controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a way as to

subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic.” (Abrams and Harpham 122). This patriarchal regime was captured by the Indian women writers as well in their works in order to show its impact on human civilization (specifically the marginalised 50% population) and to liberate the disparaged section from the cruelty of male dominance.

In *Kaavya Phule*, Savitribai strikingly encapsulates the patriarchal setup that has been reinforced from the very beginning of the matriarchy period until the present day. Robert Southey, an English poet of the 19th century, elucidates on his views on women writers in a letter to Charlotte Brontë and warns the women saying, “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be” (Hartley, 1970); again confining the women to the domestic sphere and asking them to focus on the assigned roles and responsibilities. We see that this not only applies to the western writers of the 19th century, rather it very well applies to all the women writers across the world. Savitribai Phule, having witnessed the fickle way of the world described by her in several of her poems, motivates her contemporaries and the female community to shatter this absurd belief of the patriarchal society and to surpass the boundaries to attain equality. From the very beginning of patriarchy not only the enclosing roles are emphasised but also the importance of women’s chastity has been stressed upon by the society which contributed to the objectification of women over the centuries keeping it alive till today. In poem no. 17 of *Kaavya Phule*, entitled “Jasmine bud”, the poet explores this objectification that goes on to such a severe extent that it ruins a woman’s life altogether. The poem is an extended metaphor, where the poet personifies the jasmine flower as a woman and goes on traversing through its life’s journey in the poem. As it is widely known, jasmine mostly symbolises beauty, purity and sensuality mainly because of its features. In point of fact, we know that it is a five-petaled, white

flower that blooms at night and engulfs the surroundings with its intense fragrance; therefore it is also considered to be the symbol of modesty. These very characteristics are also the attributes of women of a patriarchal society that ultimately add on to their list of dos and don'ts and standard of living. The poet in the poem as well expresses the consequences of such a regime that affects women's lives. She begins by describing the jasmine bud as 'beauteous', 'tender' and 'youthful'; just like a girl child who gradually blooms into a young and magnificent woman; and further in the poem says that with the conditioning that she is brought up, she becomes the prototype of an ideal woman burrowing her individuality, desires and dreams; and transforming herself into the epitome of Rati, the goddess in Hindu mythology, known for her beauty and sensuality. As the name of the goddess is derived from the Sanskrit term *ram*, meaning "enjoy" or "rejoice" in; and therefore, etymologically, is considered to be the goddess of love who is associated with arousal and delight of sexual activity. It is also important to note the circumstances in which Rati was created, as it helps the reader to understand the objectification of women and Rati's (also women's) association with sexual arousal. According to the myth, Brahma created Kama, the god of love; and asked Daksha (one of the prajapatis) to present Kama with a wife. However, the very first people to be attacked by Kama's flower-arrows (meant to spread love) are Brahma himself and the prajapatis, who as a result lust for Sandhya, Brahma's daughter. Upon witnessing this scene, Shiva who was passing by laughs at the men because of which all the prajapatis and Brahma start perspiring; and hence Rati is born from Daksha's sweat who he presents to Kama as a wife (Mani 2019). The way Rati was objectified and created for the sole purpose of satisfying Kama's desires, likewise, all the women across the world have been objectified by the patriarchal world because of the gender that they were asked to conform to. Savitribai Phule, thereby in the poem elucidates on the system of

depersonalisation and oppression carried on since history, where a woman was supposed to complete her domestic duties and during the night be humiliated by men and was perhaps also raped by her husband, which destroyed her being completely. Therefore the poet says, “At night she becomes Rati, the Goddess of love and lust, / the fragrant, playful, jasmine bud. / In the end, she is annihilated, / this mortal jasmine bud.” (lines 6 – 9).

In yet another poem entitled “Come along!”, Savitribai expresses the age old tradition of slavery of women, where women of the society, are considered mere slaves to their master i.e. the men of the house. They were excluded and alienated from all the socio-cultural practices, which is conspicuous when Vrinda Nabar in one of her research lecture series entitled “Imagining Women: Representation in Cinema and Literature”, quotes Gilbert and Gubar’s views that shed light on the odds against which women writers struggled, and which are all the more clearly applicable to the ordinary women population as well; as they state that women face “isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis” (Nabar). However, the women were ironically, not excluded from their domestic tasks, which is apparent when the mind-sets of the 19th century women is explored by the poet in the above mentioned poem. In the poem, a ceremonial gathering of ‘Goddess Saraswati’ is to be held and this is being discussed by five groups of five girls each. The girls have been debating whether or not they should attend the gathering and whether it is worth their time. What grabs a reader’s attention is how the girls of the second and third group put forth their views regarding the above gathering. The second group says, “What is the point of this gathering? Mere nuisance, come let us play. / There’s no point to school: let’s play Phugadis. / Come along, oh come along and play.” (lines 6 – 8). The above lines taken from the poem illustrates the priorities of girls during the 19th century,

which in turn portray the socio-cultural scenario wherein education of girls was considered a 'mere nuisance' and the girls themselves having brought up in the same setup believed it to be useless and unworthy of acquiring it. The third group on the other hand says, "We do not agree, let's go home and do our chores. / Let's help mother a little and make her happy, / Let's gratify her, come along, oh come along." (lines 10 – 12). The intention of quoting these lines, was to put forth the significance of doing household chores which was the skill that the girls had acquired and were taught to be of utmost importance. However, although in some cases the mothers themselves urged their girls to be focused on their roles, there were the emerging new women too who had made up their minds to resist these practices and raise their girls equally with the boys and therefore when asked by the five groups for advice regarding what their priorities should be, the mother says, "A person's true jewel is his education... / The first task is to learn. / The second task is to play games. / When it is possible to do some chores, sweep and wipe the floor." (lines 19 – 22).

In *Padmarag*, the author provides us with evidences of the patriarchal regime from the very beginning until the end of the novel. "In silence they rise, in silence they set; / who keeps track, who keeps an account?" (Hossain 39). It is Saudamini, one of the sisters of Tarini Bhavan, who alludes to the practice of infanticide in a patriarchal setup, which is confirmed by Nalini when she quotes some lines of a poet and says, "Full many a gem of purest ray serene, / The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear: / Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, / And waste its sweetness on the desert air." (Hossain 39). Infanticide, which is carried out because a girl child is considered a burden and unworthy of life has been a practice in India since many decades. Although it was banned in India in 1870 when The Female Infanticide Prevention Act was passed in the said year, there is a high rate in the cases in some of the states of India even today.

Sharqua Noori Ansari, a research scholar from Aligarh Muslim University explores the causes and prevention techniques of this crime in her research paper where she states that this problem has been going on since centuries because of the patriarchal nature of the society making it a crime which is as aged as some cultures in India and which denies the girls their most fundamental right, i.e. “the right to life” (Ansari 1154). And unsurprisingly it transcends all faiths, cultures, communities and religions which makes it all the more blood-curdling and cruel to women across the globe. One of the reasons of infanticides is the issue of dowry. The author covers these issues in an order in various chapters. In the chapter called ‘Domestic Life’, Hossain sheds light on the sequence of events that take place during Siddika’s child marriage. As she was betrothed to Latif at a very young age of twelve by her brother and Latif’s uncle Haji, she was not the stakeholder of half of her property as she was underage and therefore it was to be inherited by her at the age of eighteen. Haji had agreed to this contract initially, however when he saw better prospects of taking over some widow’s property by marrying Latif to the widow’s daughter, he starts to stir trouble and break off Siddika and Latif’s betrothal. In a letter to Siddika’s brother, he warns him that the marriage cannot take place unless the property is handed over to the bride before marriage. He says that “if the property were not made over to the young woman as he demanded, she would not be acceptable as a bride for his nephew and he would have to marry the latter off to someone else.” (Hossain 62). Hence proved, that dowry in a patriarchal society was a common practice which had the potential of harming the women not only physically, but emotionally as well which gave rise to the increase in the population of child widows.

Along with the above issues, one can also observe the problem of motherhood where soon after marriage a woman is supposed to give the in-laws a grandson and if

she fails to do so, she is cursed, tortured and called barren ‘baanjh’ or a witch. This is what Saudamini too has to face as a step-mother and yet motherhood eluded her; as a result, Lalita, her younger sister-in-law called her a witch and would say, “In all fairness, should this be allowed to happen? Should fate allow the one who evicts those poor, motherless children from their own home to usurp and enjoy what should have been their just due? God is watching over them. Why would He allow anyone to lay claim to their share?” (Hossain 75). Apart from the domestic setup, even in professional setups one can witness the patriarchal rule and absurd perception of the society. For instance, Dina Tarini Sen has to face cruelty at the hands of the patriarchal society, when after the celebration of twentieth jubilee of the school and the prize distribution ceremony, the parents send countless number of letters consisting of complaints and insults aimed at the founder of Tarini Bhavan. The complaints were pretty silly but the aggressive manner in which the letters were written makes one question the system of power dynamics where even though the women have the power in the professional setup, they end up being the victims of the masculine creatures of the society who question women’s ways of handling things. One such letter is addressed to Tarini Sen by Zuleikha’s father, who claims Tarini to be incapable of handling the affairs of the schools and the students solely because his daughter was not given a prize. Therefore in the letter he downgrades Tarini by saying, “With this kind of inferior intellect, only to be seen in women, how do you expect to make any progress? Now, had a man been a member of the school’s executive committee, he could have shown you how a school ought to be run.” (Hossain 135).

Similar instances could be seen in Krupabai Satthhianadhan’s novel *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* as well, as it helps its readers in understanding the system of male-dominated society in detail. A single statement uttered by Kamala tells all about the

stronghold of patriarchy that prevailed during the time the novel was set and published. The statement being, “Kamala put her head down and said that if her lord had forgotten she had forgotten too” (Sathianadhan 173); this was when they would quarrel on trivial matters and when Ganesh would say bitter things and insult her but later would come back and would tell her to let the bygones be bygones. It was also during these quarrels that Kamala would realise her position in Ganesh’s eyes and in the household as she would feel that she was considered less than even a servant. Apart from Ganesh’s treatment towards her, her mother-in-law and sister-in-law would also constantly call her with names like *Kydashin* and considered her a mere burden who would be better off dead and also when she gives birth to her child, she has to listen to things like, “She is fit for nothing – a drag not only on her husband but also on her people”... and when Kamala’s child was born they spoke of the infant as an additional load and burden on them. “Who needed a child just now, and that, too, a girl?” (Sathianadhan 168). Although at an early stage of their marriage, Ganesh seemed to be a kind-hearted, practical man who was determined on tutoring Kamala when he learns of her interest in studies, he loses interest in his task as well like any other ordinary man when the family starts admonishing him for teaching his wife, who in a patriarchal setup must be treated as a mere slave:

His mother and sisters disapproved of his conduct and accused him of forgetting his manhood; for, said they, what man with any self-respect would make much of his wife, give her learning, and raise her up to his own level? The wife, as the saying went, was ‘the cat under the plate,’ the slave of the family and her lord.” (Sathianadhan 80).

Moreover, as the couple belonged to an orthodox family that was engrained with patriarchal beliefs and restrictions, one can easily identify the kind of relationship

couples in patriarchal societies had; for the women were considered the property of man who must neither utter their Lord's name nor cast a glance at their wedded husbands, because they were supposed to maintain the decorum of the family and adhere to the said rules. Nevertheless, the men were not asked to follow any such rules because as men they hold the position of the superior beings in any community who are never ordered around by people. And so when Kamala by any chance happened to be in the same room as her husband, she would cover her face with her 'pallu' and look at any random thing but not at her husband, Ganesh. Therefore Krupabai writes, "When anything took her to the room where he was, he would look at her frankly as if she was his property, and this brought a flush of shame to her face." (Sattthianadhan 64). Not only does Kamala, but other women like Bhagirathi and Harni too had to endure oppression at the hands of the patriarchal society. When Bhagirathi leaves her husband, she is abused and disparaged by the villagers who mock her for taking such a step because one of the villagers says, "Don't you know that if a man be tied to you once, you cannot free yourself from him, even if he be an ass. The halter is round your neck, let it be wooden or golden, it is all the same." (Sattthianadhan 59). And Harni, who was twelve years old yet married is physically as well as verbally abused by her mother-in-law, who beats and makes her starve if the lord of the house, i.e. Harni's husband skips food even once. It could be hence concluded that the patriarchal regime has been endless and is one of the major factors that leads to female subjugation.

3.3 Role of Religion in Female Oppression: *Padmarag* and *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, in the preface to *Padmarag*, describes her perspective on religion as:

Religion is like a three-storeyed mansion. On the ground floor are many rooms – for Hindus and their many castes ... for Muslims and their various sects ... so also for Christians ... On the first floor, you will see Muslims ... or Hindus ... and so on. Then go up to the second floor and you will see just one room with no divisions. That is, there are no Muslims or Hindus or anything else of the kind. Just human beings. (Hossain 19).

This is to say that on the ground and the first floor, with all the people and their superstitious beliefs, religion plays the highest role in female oppression. Whereas once the society attains the religion that resides on the second floor, where the human beings think of the people and for the people and are united with each other; it is only then can any community acquire equality and treat each individual humanely irrespective of which gender, class, caste or religion they conform to. Therefore, depending on the storey a person's beliefs belong to, religion is capable of restricting the people as well as liberating them from oppression. In *Padmarag*, Latif's mother, a devout Muslim, fails to identify the difference between superstitious beliefs and reality, which is evident when she is flabbergasted upon seeing Siddika's hands bare and hence is seen exclaiming in disbelief and saying that Siddika's arms look unattractive because she does not wear bangles. Tarini, who witnesses the scene refers to Usharani and informs Latif's mother that, "it would be unseemly for her to look attractive. Superstition has prevented certain Hindu women here from discarding their conch-shell bangles." (Hossain 126). Usharani, is known in Tarini Bhavan for not having discarded the symbols of her marriage, when in the first place, her cowardly husband does not deserve her at all. Usha, initially a Brahmin housewife, now a teacher at Tarini School, is abandoned by her in-laws after being abducted by robbers from her home while her cowardly husband watched the horrifying scene silently with no resistance whatsoever.

The in-laws, fearing that Usha would bring disgrace to the family, in order to protect their so called self-esteem as they belonged to the respectable caste of Hindu religion, outcaste her on grounds that they cannot accept an impure and polluted woman who was out at night alone with strangers. Yet when Usha is asked for the reason for not throwing away the conch-shell shackles, she says “I won’t take off my conch-shell bangle; it is the mark of a married woman.” (Hossain 92). This reveals the Hindu religious belief that doesn’t allow women to discard their marital symbols before their death or their husbands death, reveals the kind of upbringing that Usha or all other Hindu women for that matter receive in their Hindu households. Nevertheless it can be seen that she and all other wronged women at the Bhavan manage to improve their lives and learn the religion of humanity which is the need of the hour.

Islam too restricts women through various practises and purdah system is one of them. The purdah system that has to be adhered to by all the Muslim women was not observed in Tarini Bhavan. As a result, when the alumni of Tarini school, Rezia Banu, the very first Muslim student of the school, does not show up for the twentieth jubilee celebration and the alumni meeting; the women at the Bhavan enquire about the reasons behind it. It is then that Banu informs them about how her mother-in-law had stopped her because purdah was not observed in the Bhavan and also because she hated the idea of such an organisation and the founder too; and therefore called Dina Tarini Sen a whore; to which Tarini says, “Members of the Brahmo community call me a... outright. Muslim society hasn’t got around to loving me quite as much.” (Hossain 149), which confirms one’s suspicion that this is not the first time when people from different religions have called her names and have disapproved of her efforts to build a secular society. Rafiya Begum, the typist of Tarini Bhavan, too abides by the Islamic teachings where a man is allowed to have three-to-four wives, whereas a Muslim woman is

supposed to be married once and supposed to be the wife of that certain man for life, regardless of the atrocities that she has to live through. So when her lawyer husband goes to England to qualify for the Bar leaving her and their two daughters behind; returns back ten years later with a second wife and divorces Rafiya. But as she was brought up with the Islamic teachings where a woman getting divorce is considered disgraceful, she finds it impossible to move on from her relationship and carries the baggage of it till date. But it is also seen that she gained a lot from the hardships that she faced, as we see her voicing out her thoughts fearlessly when Latif praises her typing skills and she gives the credit to her tormentors saying, “Thanks to the abuse heaped on me by members of your sex!” (Hossain 111). Nevertheless, one must observe the practice of the religion of humanity as portrayed by the author, as all the women at the Bhavan, irrespective of which faith they belong to, work together for the betterment of all the marginalized women, as the organisation had sisters from almost all the religions. Hence, Hossain says, “What commendable egalitarianism! Muslims, Christians, Brahmos, Hindus – all working in harmony, as though born from the same womb.” (Hossain 30).

Likewise, in *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*, the author has depicted the role religion played in oppressing Kamala, the protagonist of the novel; and other women characters. When Kamala is subjugated in her marital house by her husband’s family, where she has to work throughout the day, complete all the domestic tasks and yet experience their undesired wrath, she begins to question their actions but because of her religious convictions she becomes resigned to her duties as she had received and imbibed the teachings of the heroic tales of Seeta and had learnt “the great lesson of humanity, love for others and the need of doing one’s duty at any cost” (Sattianadhan 57); from all the stories and fables that she had heard from the elders of her hometown.

Along with the teachings received from the crude stories, heroic tales and fables, she had also been taught the absurd notion of ‘fate’, as she believed that it was her fate to face such humiliation from her family. She had imbibed the teachings to such an extent that “she wished to be exemplary like Savitri, Seeta and other noble women” (Saththianadhan 58), and just the way they had to submit to fate, Kamala too reasoned and transformed herself into the “passive Kamala, the toy and prey of circumstances, submitting quietly to every tyranny, bearing calmly every new load of suffering as if everything was the outcome of fate.” (Saththianadhan 86). Furthermore, Kamala is seen suppressing her desires as one nears the end of the novel when having witnessed the care of Ramachander, she wishes Ganesh had been more like Ramachander, but she also feels ashamed of herself for allowing such a thought to creep into the deep chambers of her being. Also, when in the last chapter, Ramchander proposes to Kamala and asks her to be his wife for the rest of her life, her faith and rudimentary beliefs stops her from doing so and so she frees herself from the overwhelming power of Ramchander’s love, although she too shares the same feelings as him. Pandita Ramabai, another Indian feminist attacked the teachings and scriptures of Hinduism having understood the low status that the scriptures assign to women in India. As a result, she converted to Christianity and the reason behind this she states is that:

... the Dharma Shastras, the sacred epics, the Puranas ... and orthodox high-caste men, agreed: that women of high and low caste as a class, were bad, very bad, worse than demons, as unholy as untruth, and that they could not get Moksha as men [could]. (Omvedt 32).

These very teachings are seen to be part of the Hindu women in the texts as well as in reality, because they not only try to be the prototype of ideal women, but also question themselves and feel disgusted by their desires. Also when Ganesh cheats on Kamala by

involving with a woman named Sai, the wife of Kamala's cousin Ramchander, and deceives Kamala, he does not take the responsibility of his own actions and instead blames the woman of the house of being infidel to him and being in love with Ramchander secretly. He further accuses her to such an extent that he says that their child is not his and compels her to walk out of her own house in the middle of the night. However, although heartbroken, Kamala walks out on her husband saying in a calm voice:

Kill myself I cannot; that would bring you into trouble. God will reveal the truth; but I will not stay here anymore. Then she told him that if anybody asked about her he was to say she had gone to see her father who was ill. It will silence all evil tongues and no disgrace will be attached to you. (*Kamala* 182).

This deepens our understanding of Kamala's character, who being a devout Hindu and having been a part of a value-based socio-cultural structure, follows the Hindu belief that restricts women from not divorcing their unfaithful husbands no matter how much the women suffer. Therefore, we see that Kamala is determined to find the solution to her problems by staying within the structure of her religion and therefore decides to go to her in-laws' ancestral house to seek refuge.

Moreover, religion not only binds Kamala from attaining a relationship full of love and kindness, but it also ends all the roads that may have led to Bhagirathi's happiness. Like her friend Kamala, Bhagirathi too refuses to run away with Krishnan, a man who had proposed to her for marriage and wanted to free her from her husband's cruelty. However, she takes a similar decision to that of Kamala, because as a married woman, she was supposed to be loyal to her cruel husband, who in turn practiced polygamy in front of her eyes humiliating and abusing her in all the ways possible, yet she couldn't break the restrictions imposed on her by her religion and choose a life full

of respect and affection. The laws and fines for practising polygamy were prescribed in ancient India not only by Manu but also by other prominent law-givers like Narada, Brihaspati and Vajnavalkya; which is explored by Vinita Chandra in her work *Gender Relations in Early India*. And so, according Narada and Brihaspati, “when a woman seduces a man ... severe punishment is prescribed for her which includes cutting of her nose, lips and ears, and then after being paraded in the streets and plunged into water, torn to pieces by dogs in a place frequented by visitors. Only half of this punishment is prescribed for the man.” (Chandra 111). However, in Ganesh and Bhagirathi’s husbands’ case, they were neither punished nor disgraced for conducting polygamy. The author also highlights the attitude of the families after giving their daughters away in marriages as she writes:

But as it was with Kamala, so it usually is in Hindu families. Once given over, the daughter so lovingly brought up, is no more the concern of her parents. It is improper for them to interfere in any way with her new life, for what is written in the book of fate comes to pass. (Satthainadhan 82).

Also in the “Introductory Memoir” of the novel, Mrs. H. B. Grigg introduces the novel as, “it professes to be, essentially a tale of Indian life ... We are admitted into the secrets of an Indian household, - the difficulties and the sorrows of a Hindu wife and mother.” (Grigg 30).

The above instances therefore prove that religion too plays a crucial role in subjugating women in all the ways possible and this could be stopped only when humans practice a religion that is based on love and truth, i.e. a kind of religion that Hossain highlights in *Sultana’s Dream*, “it is our religious duty to love one another and to be absolutely truthful.” (Hossain 13).

3.4 The Struggle against the Evils of Casteism and Classism: *Kaavya Phule*

The Indian society is made up of several religions, sects, castes and classes; making it a diverse country with people who follow and perform diverse cultures and rituals. This division in the social structure, formed a kind of system that led to restrictions and stratification of certain people within the communities because of the severe emphasis on their caste and class. The system has been existing since centuries and the scenario in 19th century India was no different. Savitribai Phule, in her poetry collection lays emphasis on this very caste system prevailing in India and brings forth the hardships of the marginalized lower classes of Hindu society. The Hindu religious scriptures segregate it's population into various 'jatis' which comprises of Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras making the practice dominant in all the spheres of life. This segregation is based on various factors which are mentioned by Mason Olcott in "The Caste System of India" and the following factors that are believed to be responsible for caste division according to various theorists like Risley, who thought that caste originated because of races and hypergamy, Senart believed that it was caused because of the family worship of generations, while Nesfield and Deblmann claimed that the occupation of people caused its origins. It therefore could be concluded that all the factors when combined together give rise to such a stratification because all of the theories seem to be incomplete without the others being considered. (Olcott 649). It is believed that during the ancient period when the Aryana and Dravidians started facing racial confrontations among themselves, the Aryans accepted and included the Dasas or Dasyus, i.e. the Dravidians; into their class and because of this mutual accommodation, the fourth varna called "Sudra" emerged and were given a lower place in the hierarchical order. It is important to note that although they belonged to the varnas, they were not allowed to study the vedas because of the lower status in the

society; and were destined to serve the Aryans (Char 16 - 17). Having stated the above, it is important to mention that not only did the caste system originate and evolve over time, but it also impacted the lives, behaviours and people's attitude towards each other to a great extent, as it ultimately generated inequalities and unjustness amongst the masses. Mason Olcott rightly points out this imbalance and inequity when he says:

If born a Brahman, the so-called "pinnacle of perfection," "lord of creation," his soul has been scrupulous in its observances and ceremonials during countless earlier lives. But if he is born a lowly Sudra, he has not fulfilled his caste dharma, while if he is born a despised outcaste, that is convincing proof of the foulness of his deeds in previous incarnations. (Olcott 648 – 649).

Something similar is explored by Dr. C. Paramasivan in "Casteism in India", when the researcher quotes Kaka Kalelkar, who says, "Casteism is an over-riding blind and supreme group loyalty that ignores the healthy social standards of justice, fair play, equity and universal brotherhood." (Paramasivan 93). Casteism therefore could be understood as a system wherein an individual who conforms to a certain caste may either be discriminated against or may receive favours and enjoy ample number of opportunities just based on his/her caste. There was also a fifth caste which was not a part of the varna system which was later termed as the Dalits also called as Harijans or untouchables, as they and their touch was considered to be polluting. Uma Chakravarti in her *Gendering Caste through a feminist lens*, illuminates to the experiences of Dalits when she quotes a Dalit feminist writer Kumud Pawde, who says, "The result is that although I try to forget my caste, it is impossible to forget. And then I remember an expression that I heard somewhere: 'What comes by birth and can't be cast off by dying – that is caste'." Chakravati also explores the severity of the oppression that is faced by the Dalit women because she asks the readers to realise the fact that the oppression

faced by the Dalits and women is far more dehumanizing than any economic exploitation; and therefore she believes that the revered caste ideology deprives the Dalits of not only their dignity and personhood but also of any kind of subjectivity. Further in the same text, the author reveals Manu's justification and perception on caste as she writes, "According to Manu, 'the name of a brahmana should have a word for auspicious, of a Kshatriya for strength, the name of a Vaishya for wealth, and the name of a Sudra should breed disgust'." (Chakravarti 1 – 20).

Therefore, the underprivileged caste that Savitribai Phule foregrounds in her work is that of Shudras and Dalits, who are believed to be the people belonging to the lower castes in the hierarchical social order and therefore are the victims of social, cultural, spiritual and political exclusion. Their job is that of cleanliness and are forced by the upper-castes to do all the odd jobs within the community. To some extent Casteism also leads to classism, as the term refers to the belief that people of some social class can be characterized as inferior or superior in comparison to the people of some other class. For example, Shudras, as they belong to the lowest of castes are supposed to serve the other superior castes in all the ways possible, yet they're to maintain their distance from the so called upper-castes and abide by the norms, principles and standards, which restrict them from receiving equal treatment, opportunities and rights; leading to their oppression. As they are to mind all the menial jobs, they belong to the lower class of the society, due to the lack of economic stability, lack of education and lack of power leading to their low standard of living, because of which the highly privileged section of the society consider them worthless. This relationship between caste and class is explained by Uma Chakravarti through Gerald Berreman's description of caste system in India, for he says, "The human meaning of caste *for those who live it*," he states, 'is power and vulnerability, honour and degradation, plenty and want, reward and

deprivation, security and anxiety””; and according to Chakravarti, it is this unequal access to material resources and power which are the defining features of the prevailing caste system in India. (11)

Moreover, casteism and classism leads to double marginalization of the women belonging to the Shudra caste, as they have to go through psychological, physical and spiritual traumas to a higher degree than men, as a consequence for conforming to the identity of being a woman. Savitribai Phule’s poetry collection *Kaavya Phule*, highlights the hardships of and treatment received by the Shudras at the hands of upper-castes and class; and also goes on to provide a solution to this oppression through some of her poems. In the “Glossary” of *Kaavya Phule*, the poet defines the term Shudras as, “individuals belonging to the lowest of the four castes, historically oppressed by the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas” (Chakne, Kaavya Phule). Likewise, Gail Omvedt defines the term Dalit as, “Members of scheduled castes and tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion.” (Omvedt 74). In the *Kaavya Phule*, the poet, in poem no. 24 and 25, entitled “Says Manu” and “Brahma’s farm” respectively, illustrates the historical background that lead to the subjugation of the Shudras. In poem no. 24, Manu’s propounded duties which are to be adhered to by the Shudras are explained, where the poet informs the readers that it was Manu who claimed that the people who were involved in agricultural sector were dumb and “stupid”, and for the stated reason he forbade the Brahmins to farm, in his *Manusmriti*. He further extends his views on the birth of Shudras and says, “A Shudra takes birth: / the previous life’s sins are carried into this life / by every Shudra.” (lines 5 – 7). And it is because of this claim, that he reasons and justifies the hierarchical social division and the inequalities, which is looked down upon by the poet for she says “This social

practice is designed to be unequal; / the morals of the shrewd are inhumane.” (lines 8 – 9). Through the poem, Savitribai stresses upon the biased views proposed in “Manusmriti”, which provided the upper-castes, i.e. Brahmins, the privilege of being superior and the right to humiliate the lower-castes by imposing upon them all the possible sufferings and pain, which they deserved as stated in *Manusmriti*. The themes of the poem is extended by the poet and explored in detailed in poem no. 25, interlinking both the poems with each other. In the latter poem, Manu’s ideas that hail the Brahmins as superior beings are elaborated upon by the poet as she narrates to us the unjust behaviour of the Brahmins towards Shudras. Although the Brahmins do not farm, but they do enjoy the food and grains that are produced by the Shudras, yet they mercilessly beat and thrash the Shudras showcasing their arrogance and selfish-ethics. Savitribai’s claims can be claimed to be true, because Omvedt in his *Understanding Caste From Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond*, explains Phule’s ideas of caste based domination. According to Jotiba Phule, Brahmins did not only assume superiority in the social order, but more importantly, “they were cruel and violent invaders who had overturned an originally prosperous and egalitarian society, using every kind of deceit and violence...” (25). Therefore, one must study both the poems together and try and relate the evils of casteism that are portrayed by the poet. Also, the egalitarian society that Phule talks about, where neither casteism nor classism existed and for which he has the highest value, is also examined by Savitribai in her poem entitled “Ode to King Bali” (poem no. 31). In the poem, the author portrays the joys, contentment, happiness and generosity of people towards each other, as they did not divide and discriminate the community into absurd social structures. In the kingdom of Bali, she says that none of the beings are restricted to study the scriptures and that yagnas and sacrifices were done by all. According to the ancient myth, Bali was the original king who reigned the

Maharashtra state of castelessness and prosperity. But he was deceived by a brahman boy called Waman, who after asking for three boons from the king, steps on Bali's chest and sends him to hell. (Omvedt 25). The deception is symbolic of the cruelty done to the lower castes by the upper-castes, who exploit and deceive the lower classes in every way possible.

Further on, in poem no. 21, entitled "The pain of the Shudras", the poet paints the picture of the period until which the Shudras have endured the pain, for she says, "The Shudras have endured two thousand years of pain. / The earthly gods, appointed by Brahma, have harassed them." (lines 1 – 2). In the same poem, Savitribai, tries to think it through and manages to note down that it is only through education, that the Shudras can destroy the evil practices, suffering and pain imposed on them by the people of highest social structure in India. But the poet doesn't stop at this, because she goes on to explore the factor, that in a way promotes this miss-treatment instead of abolishing it. So in poem no. 35, Savitribai sheds light on the kind of attitude that the Shudras showcase towards the suppression that they face; and as the titled of the poem, "The dependence of the Shudras", the poem elaborates this attitude of dependence. She says that the major cause that encourages the upper-castes and classes to continue with their discrimination is ignorance of the Shudras, as she says that the people belonging to the lower section of the society are "possessed by ignorance". And not only ignorance, but in their attempt to fulfil their duties towards God, religion and customs, they have drained themselves entirely as a result of the deprivation that they face. Pandita Ramabai too confirms these views of Savitribai when she says, "the complete and ignorance of women had been the cause of "the present degradation of the Hindu nation." (Omvedt 31). Further, the poet expands the argument and tells the readers that because of this deprivation the Shudras seem to have given up and do not attempt to

acquire a better status and standard of living in the society, because she says, “There is no greed for joy; they take delight in sorrows.” (lines 5 – 6). She also urges the lower classes to apprehend the kind of lessons they’ve been learning from the so-called creators, i.e. the Brahmins, as they have imbibed in themselves the misconception that they are worthy of whatever wrong is being done to them and believe it to be their fate that cannot be changed. Likewise, the poet also alludes to the mind-sets of the upper-classes who pretend to be self-disciplined and ascetic, yet go about the world rejecting their responsibilities and instead of providing their services as priests, they consciously involve themselves in the evil practices of casteism and classism at the same time thinking about their moral virtues as the poet says, “The ascetic priest begs, / wanders renouncing responsibilities, / gives fruitless service, / contemplating heavenly virtues” (lines 9 – 12). Nevertheless, the poet does not give up for a better tomorrow, as the hope and attempts to better their tomorrows is vividly depicted in poem no. 38 which is called “Our English Mother”, wherein the poet portrays the advantages of learning English language and looks at the positive aspect of British colonial rule. The poet asks the marginalized sections of the society to believe in themselves and consider themselves capable of bringing the change they want in the society, by learning to read and write which will encourage and develop their reasoning abilities and help them break away the customs, rituals and traditions that promotes their unjust status of inferiority. She furthermore motivates the lower class Shudras to wake up and see the decline of Brahmanical kingdom as the English claim victory and provide them with a chance to gain from the English education provided to them by the colonisers. Therefore, she explains, “A shelter of knowledge for the Shudras, / care and refuge for the Dalits, / the English dynasty is of joy. / The terror is over, our English mother is here.” (lines 19 – 22). In one more similar poem, called “Learn English”, the poet asks the people to

acquire and be efficient with the English language, for it is this education that will provide them with the strength to fight against discrimination and to attain an equal position in the society. She puts forth this thought in the poem when she writes, “In order to overcome their sorrows, the Shudras and Dalits /have come upon this opportunity to learn English. / Destroy caste discrimination by learning English, / by throwing out the tiresome tales of the priests.” (lines 5 – 8). Hence, along with examining the evils of casteism and classism, the poet attempts to contribute to the betterment of the under-privileged group by providing the possible solutions to fight the prejudices and bigotry faced by them over decades.

3.5 Importance of Female Education in the Emancipation of the Oppressed

“I don’t mind if I have to sit on the floor at school. All I want is education and I am afraid of no one.” Malala Yousufzai, a female education activist who fought for the education of women in an orthodox Islamic country like Pakistan, where female education was banned by the Pakistani Taliban; yet she stayed true to her belief and firm on her efforts, which makes her a role model to all the women out there irrespective of which country they belong to. Similarly Savitribai Phule, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Krupabai Satthianadhan too were the prominent Indian education activists and feminists who gave their all to the women of the nation. As Priyamvada Redican Chakne covers a brief biography of Savitribai in the “Introduction” of *Kaavya Phule*, the readers get a glimpse of the journey of Savitribai as a social reformer of India. Along with Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai at a young age of seventeen established India’s first native school for girls which was situated in Bhide wada. Along with a girls school, she also established a school for Shudra and Ati-Shudra (Dalits) adults in Pune itself, at the age of eighteen. Having opened the first school for girls, and emphasizing female education, it was Savitribai Phule who spearheaded the women’s liberation movement in India. It

is also important to note that this prominent woman reformer did not stop with establishments of the schools itself, rather she took another step ahead by also opening several organisations that raised women's issues and were aimed at empowering women. Priyamvada Redican Chakne, in the introduction says, "She (Savitribai) devoted her life to the service of the oppressed in not only providing them with the opportunity of an education, but also apprising them about the need and the importance of one"; and these empowering ideals are addressed by Savitribai in her poem called "Superior Wealth". Here, she stresses upon the importance of education and prioritises it by saying, "Consider knowledge as the Goddess: / be persistent in your effort to benefit from Her /... / Knowledge is wealth, superior to all other wealth: / whoever accumulates Her / is considered a person of wisdom by the people" (lines 7 – 11). In another poem called "English is our mother", the poet asks the marginalised section and lower castes like Shudras, to acquire knowledge and to emancipate themselves as she believes that English language gives the human race true knowledge, love, life and spreads humanity within the masses by ending cruelty and oppressive practices. Similarly, in poem no. 32 and 34 which are titled as "Learn English" and "Wake up to learn" respectively, Savitribai explores the significance of education in daily lives because in the former poem she says. "The self-reliant business of life / requires wealth of knowledge: persevere / deprived of knowledge, beasts waste away / Do not sit idle; seek wisdom." (lines 1 – 4). Likewise, in the latter poem too, she informs the Dalits and Shudras that they can attain freedom from oppression only through educating themselves and all the people in their surroundings, be it man or woman; and not only to acquire education but also apply it to liberate themselves from the shackles of slavery. She compares the British Empire to the kingdom of Bali where everyone is blessed with

wisdom and where discrimination and oppression did not exist and everyone were provided with equal opportunities.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain too, like Savitribai; in the nineteenth and twentieth century made several attempts to uplift the oppressed women and one such attempt was the foundation of Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam in 1916, which comprised of women belonging to varied beliefs who would take up a number of activities to gear up the social reformation. This organisation was identical to that of the Tarini Bhavan portrayed in *Padmarag* and therefore it was stated in the earlier sections of the dissertation that the novel has realistic and autobiographical elements taken from Hossain's life. Sufiya Kamal, a Bangladeshi freedom fighter and social activist, illustrates the experiences that she gained when she was a part of the above organisation, for she said that when the women of the organisation were sent to the slums to provide basic education to the children and adults, and to impart skills like sewing, embroidery and handicrafts; they were stopped and prevented from entering the place by hostile men of the locality (Bagchi 2). Also, through *Padmarag*, one gets influenced by the extent to which Rokeya has depicted education as the only weapon to fight discrimination. All the women working at Tarini Bhavan improve their lives and resist subjugation by educating each other at every point of their stay at the Bhavan. Beginning from Dina Tarini Sen to Saudamini, Usharani, Rafiya, Nalini, Sakina, Rafika, Bibha, Koresha to Siddika / Padmarag, all these women acquire not the bookish knowledge of present century which is all about rote learning, but they attain true knowledge that actually helps them in making their day-to-day duties efficient. An instance to prove the above statement is when Siddika's brother Muhammad Suleiman after being deceived by Siddika's uncle-in-law, vows to give Siddika the wisdom that will make her independent enough to not be enslaved by any man in the future. He

confides in her and says, “I am bent on giving you the kind of education that will make you so self-reliant that never will you have to depend on some rascal for your daily bread.” (Hossain 143). Also, in *Sultana’s Dream*, through the Queen’s decisions, Hossain highlights the importance of female education. The Queen in the novella, circulates an order that all the women in her country should be educated because of which many girls’ schools and two universities were opened which were founded and supported by the government. These establishments opened avenues of opportunities for women as it spread education widely in Ladyland and along with it, early marriages were also banned by the Queen. (Hossain 7). Krupabai Sathianadhan also promotes the need for education just like the other two authors. In her novel, Kamala’s mother Lakshmi was educated by Narayan irrespective of the contempt of the patriarchal society that he had to face for the sole reason of educating his wife and raising her standard on par with him. Kamala too received some amount of education from her father but unfortunately, the knowledge that she gained from the Hindu scriptures and the mythological tales lead her towards self-destruction because we find her unable to own her desires and wishes and compromise herself to keep not only her religious teachings and beliefs alive but also to be as ideal as Seeta and Savitri. Therefore, one must be aware of the kind of education that they are acquiring, because if the orthodox and patriarchal notions are inculcated by an individual it is sure to destroy the person’s life for good. Another female character through whom Krupabai demonstrates the need of education is Sai. She is an educated woman whose actions and intentions are wisely measured as she seeks to destroy the patriarchal structure by following her heart and therefore is seen as a demonic character and a villain. This shows the strict adherence of women to the domestic circle as they did not support other women who rebelled against the defined circle and did not withstand the traditional norms that were kept

alive since a long time. *Kamala* is an example of the existence of such mentality and conditioning.

Rouf Ahmad Bhat, in his research paper titled “Role of Education in the Empowerment of Women in India”, published in 2015, explores the need of education by stating that women play an important role in the progress of a family, society and country. In order to make democracy successful in the country women’s education is necessary along with that of men’s. “Educated women are the real source of happiness in the family. Education is one of the milestones for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life-style.” (Bhat, 188 – 190). He further also studied the census and draws a comparison between the literacy rate of men and women and says that, “the male literary rate is more than 82.14% and the female literacy rate is just 65.46%.” (Bhat 188). This clarifies the unstated obviousness of the inequality amongst the sexes, and one must think aback and understand that if this was the scenario recently, in 2015, then the literacy census of the nineteenth and twentieth century would considerably decrease as during the period the society was in its initial stage of development. “Education is a means to release oneself from the hands of oppression and the chains of tradition, superstition and dogmatic belief laid down by so called rulers of society.” (Rai 29). The writers truly believed in this idea and hence, focused on the same awareness aspect and portrayed the significance of education and casting off of ignorance through their works.

To conclude, through the analyses put forth in the above chapters, it is apparent that all the three selected Indian women writers were the crusaders of female education and through the portrayal of strong women characters in their narratives, they have empowered the female community immensely and these works continue to be relevant

till date as female subjugation still persists. Therefore, in the following chapter, all the primary texts will be analysed through a feminist perspective as they are a part of literature studies in order to understand the role that literature plays in female subjugation.

CHAPTER FOUR

“METAMORPHOSIS OF WOMEN FROM OPPRESSION TO EMPOWERMENT”: A FEMINIST INSIGHT INTO THE TEXTS

4.1 Introduction

With shackled wings a bird cannot exceed sky's limits; similarly, with a conservative mind-set one cannot achieve greater heights. Critical perspective towards life is as important as evolution and development. Just the way the gender norms, restrictions and subjugation has been evolving since centuries, a person's rationale and analytical abilities must be evolved in order to attain an egalitarian society. In literature studies, looking at issues and generalised everyday activities through a feminist perspective, enables individuals to familiarize themselves with the ways of the world and to criticize the wrongs and inequality prevailing in the society. This chapter will therefore cover an examination of the selected texts through a feminist perspective along with the role that literature plays in empowering women and will end with an overview of the contribution of women writers towards female empowerment.

4.2 Analysing the Selected Texts through a Feminist Lens

Embracing one's strengths, weaknesses, perspectives and differences without any biases led by conventionally habituated gender distinctions and enjoyment of opportunities equally by all the social beings is what feminism and feminists strive to procure. Phule, Sathianadhan and Hossain are three of the numerous Indian women feminists who fought for such a society through their developmental steps in the social circles and in their feminist works. In *Kaavya Phule*, apart from other evil social practices, the author also examines and criticizes the social functioning and superstitious beliefs that are carried on from various periods and which exist even today. In the period when let alone speaking, but thinking of revolting against the societal and

religious activities was considered a sin, in such an era, Savitribai had the power not only to write about them but also to spread it to the general public without fearing the criticism that will come her way as a consequence of such a revolutionary step. Her poems are rich with themes of gender inequality, caste and class segregation, gendered behaviours, education and empowerment. Various poems that have been analyzed in the previous chapters have the above themes in common. In one such poem entitled “Prayer”, a poem that depicts the irrational religious sentiments imbibed in an Indian community, the eminent poet Savitribai explores and questions the traditional cultural practices like worshipping of rocks transformed into Gods and Goddesses. She protests against such a culture where more than human beings, the rocks are valued and glorified and as a result of this glorification certain amount of India’s population suffers severely. In the poem, firstly the poet is concerned about how blind faith compels the society to worship un-living things and how the ecology and living beings have to bear the repercussions of such a faith. She asks, “By smearing shendur mixed with oil upon a rock: / you make it home for deities... / Stones answer prayers, they grant children. Why do men and women marry then?” (lines 1 – 8). At the same time she questions the sacrificial practices where an animal is sacrificed to acquire motherhood or to gain material things, foregrounding the fact that in the Indian subcontinent motherhood is such a crucial aspect of a woman’s life, that in order to acquire it, people willing harm other living beings in the name of sacrifices which has been one of the oldest practices in India. The poet here criticizes the mentality of an orthodox society where women and nature are the sufferers of all the so-called traditions and customs, because just like women whose sole purpose of life is considered serving their husbands and conceiving children to extend the family’s lineage, the sole purpose of nature and other living beings is also considered something similar as it is frequently exploited and misused in

order to satisfy one's desires and greed. Therefore by the end of the poem, the poet shouts out to the general public by asking them to think judiciously so as to obtain wisdom. At the same time she problematizes initial period of 19th century India and the earlier periods where the discriminatory practices were at its zenith, the women's position highly degraded and where the ignorant frame of mind of the social masses dominated the society; and as a means of escape from all these issues and to build a balanced society, Savitribai denounces domestic education and extends the significance of education in many of her poems.

Similarly, Hossain denounces this ethos that prevailed not only in the earlier periods but were extended towards the 20th century. Her *Sultana's Dream* is a feminist utopia that decodes the solution to all the arguments raised in her realistic literary work *Padmarag*, which really hits home upon its thorough evaluation. The central character Padmarag in the novel, witnesses the discriminatory attitude of the society to a major extent. She is informed by her brother Suleiman, to lead the life of a child-widow if she does not get a divorce from Latif. This section sheds light on the legal scenarios of 20th century where a man had the right to divorce his wife whenever he wills, on the other hand a woman must await and pray to the husband for the same as she was restricted to do it herself; for Suleiman informs Zainab / Padmarag, "If he gives you a divorce, it will be a blessing... if not, you will have to assume that you are a child-widow" (Hossain 143). The author also explores women's perceptions on men's multiple marriages and the normalized practice of polygamy that women are accustomed to. This is evident when Siddika is asked to go to Latif's house despite of his second marriage by her sister-in-law because she believed, "She whom the lover desires is a fortunate woman" (Hossain 144), and therefore she tries to persuade Zainab and Suleiman that Zainab is fortunate enough to have such a husband and she must not complain about it.

Furthermore, Latif's statement when he fails in winning over Siddika's consent and love for him makes the readers think about the mentality of men who consider women as objects which could be gained bought after bargaining for a fair price. Zainab, Latif's betrothed wife whom he had tried to save from the fire when she was attacked by Robinson the Planter and Zamindar of Chuadanga, who deceived and killed her brother and nephew in order to take over their property; had evaded him and therefore he considered her to be his lost treasure and the trophy that eluded him. (Hossain 152). Hossain also finds the gendered behaviours problematic which claim men as weak and less masculine if they cry or let their emotions flow freely like women. When Siddika rejects Latif's appeals to of reconciliation, Latif weeps out at his ill-fate but later gathers himself because he felt embarrassed for letting his emotions take over as he thought that people would talk behind his back if he was seen in such a state. Also, Dina-Tarini Sen is looked down upon by both the Hindu and Muslim communities for her reformatory spirit as she is cursed by men and women equally as shown in the text. Along with the patriarchal dominance, Hossain examines the orthodox conditioning of women in her novel. Yet, despite of the criticism that Dina-Tarini continues to face, her Bhavan and the women working for the social cause give their best to uplift the position of women in an Indian society because when Siddika questions about whether or not there is a solution and redress for the suppurating sores of the society, Saudamini proudly tells her:

That redress is the Society for the Upliftment of Downtrodden Women at Tarini Bhavan. Come, all you abandoned, destitute, neglected, helpless, oppressed women – come together. Then we will declare war on society! And Tarini Bhavan will serve as our fortress. (Hossain 104).

Having inculcated the same values throughout her stay at Tarini Bhavan, Siddika at the end of the novel decides to dedicate her life to the Bhavan and to further the welfare of women by eradicating the tradition of women's seclusion because she gains the understanding that women are not the puppets of men who can be rejected and trampled on by men and still serve the same men and declares the end of such an era by allowing the other women to cite her as an example who would narrate her story to all the young and wronged women out there apprising them about how Siddika did not bow down to the patriarchal boundaries and encourage the oppressive structures, rather became independent by educating herself and proved to the world that "married life alone is not a woman's ultimate quest; a housewife's responsibilities do not constitute life's essential duties." (Hossain 176). Along with the above issues, Hossain ascertains the Indian society that daughters are not a commodity to be given away in marriages and with whom cars and houses must be given as free gifts, criticising the all-pervading dowry system.

In *Sultana's Dream*, the author portrays a utopia where women are the central figures in all the social, political and cultural affairs and they govern the land that they are inhabiting. Hossain presents to us a society where women are as capable as men in completing the official matters and work in the offices finishing the work within a considerably less amount of time than the time required by men. In order for the efficient governance of Ladyland they have not only invented flying cars and automate agricultural process, but have also developed in the scientific field so much so that they have figured out how to manage weather conditions and at the same time manage the daily activities of the land in an organized manner. Along with the above innovations, they have regained their valued position in the society where they are no longer secluded from the outside world, rather the author has portrayed a world of reversed

gender roles in order to make the society realise the ill-treatment that the women are subjugated to. *Sultana's Dream*, therefore strives to highlight the change needed in the social circles and also depicts the benefits of a secular society where all the genders have the potential of enjoying equal treatment if the evil social practices are eradicated from its root. And if the society fails to realise the muddle in which the Indian society is existing, it foregrounds the consequences that the patriarchal society will face as a result of their ignorant attitude towards the everyday gender inequities.

The problem of dowry and other social predicaments are explored by Krupabai also in her novel *Kamala*. Betrothal of girl children during infancy and childhood had been a common practise in India which is rebuked by Krupabai in her text. Kamala is betrothed to Ramachandran, her cousin by her parents when she was an infant. However, she is married off to Ganesh because of societal pressure while Ramachandran is away studying Ayurveda from Narayan's Guru. At her marital house, she is disdained by her in-laws because she was not given a dowry at the time of the wedding and therefore was considered poor and unworthy of being Ganesh's wife who was highly educated. Also she has to bear Ganesh's wrath when he is manipulated by Sai, Ramachandran's wife who evaded him soon after their marriage and who is determined on ruining Kamala's relationship with her husband and in-laws because of her envy towards Kamala when she learns about Ramachandran's unconditional love for the protagonist. Hence, Ganesh abuses Kamala physically and emotionally and compels her to leave her house at midnight when she no longer can stand the mistreatment and servitude. Having assumed the life of a widow upon her husband's and child's death, Kamala leads her life independently and refuses to fall in the same trap of marriage when Ramachandran promises to exempt her from the obligations of the society and on providing her a life of endearment, comfort and exultation. His

aggressive approach in pursuing Kamala reveals the patriarchal mind-set that he carries as he believes it is his right to keep Kamala as his wife since she was betrothed to him. Moreover, Krupabai highlights the value of jewellery in a woman's life through the experiences of Bheema, who finds herself on the verge of a dangerous instinct where she tries to commit suicide when her mother-in-law humiliates her throughout her life and crosses all the boundaries of humiliation by asking Bheema to part with all her jewellery which were her only financial backup in times of trouble. This is when Krupabai informs the readers the worth of ornaments in a woman's life for she believes that the women toil hard in order to save some money allotted to her by her husband for household expenses and invests them in jewels because she believes that this jewellery would not be taken away from her when any calamity overtakes the family. Therefore, Krupabai writes in the novel:

She sees her future independence in the, or at least has the consolation that she will have something to fall back upon in times of distress ... life is not so dear as these jewels are, for what is the use of living, she argues within herself, to be trampled on by others and to slave for others ... such feelings ... are the outcome of wrongs committed for generations on the poor unprotected Hindu woman. (Satthianadhan 142).

Thus, a feminist insight into the selected texts revealed the oppressive functioning of 19th and 20th century India and also the reserve and determination of women to attain emancipation from this oppressive set-up. The previous chapters serve as a foundation to this section as all the malicious practices predominant in the society have been illustrated upon and new women's emergence is explained exhaustively.

4.3 Analysing the Role of Literature in Women Empowerment

Just like the evolution in the women's status in India, literature has also been evolving significantly in terms of its forms, themes, narrative techniques and perceptions as it is often influenced by the western thoughts and ideas. The study of the history of literature narrates to us a tale of how women made themselves visible in the male dominated literary canons and fearlessly elucidated on the need for societal change and inclusion of women in all the fields of life. Women's empowerment is a wide concept as it relates to several forms of women's experiences in the social, political, cultural and psychological domains and highlights the defected activities that require alterations time and again. In her book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir highlights how social traditions and human civilization as a whole, construct gender norms and expectations that cause certain living beings to be perceived as feminine. She says that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman". Her literature exhibits a simultaneously related expansion between the internal and external affairs of the society and the way it impacts a woman's psychological state. She therefore, shares her perceptions of and expectations from the society that she lives in by means of literary expression.

Literary expression and criticism equally contributed in the empowerment of women in India both during the 19th and 20th century and today as well. Expression is what enables all the social beings to comprehend and respect each other's views regarding certain aspects of life. The aim of writers of selected centuries was to empower women to such an extent that they gained the right to make choices and decisions for themselves by shattering the structural codes of subjectivity and dependency imposed on women. Ram Mohan Das in his 1993 publication of *Women in Manu's Philosophy*, illustrates on this dependency syndrome which was a consequence of Manu's proposed rules as documented in his *Manusmriti*. Das in his work elaborates

on the so called reasonable place assigned to women by Manu in the firework of society. According to Manu, daughters are more tender physically and too delicate emotionally because of which they must be treated with more affection, care and should be looked after as they were unfit to protect themselves. Also, for the above reason they were to be exempted from studying Vedas as he regarded a woman too sentimental to endure and comprehend teachings. Therefore he believed that a woman is a mistress of the house only because she is efficient in her domestic work and men hold expertise in the social circles. In the above context, he makes marriages of women mandatory because handling the household, conceiving and looking after the husband was proposed as their *dharma*. And therefore, a woman was supposed to preserve her virginity before marriage and be chaste and loyal to her husband after marriage and was confined to the four high walls of these laws, traditions and customs. (Das 6 – 21). This is one of the reasons why one can find limited women's literature during the ancient period. Moreover, as women have been accustomed to and oblivious of the negative impact structural dependency has on them; one realises that this attitude calls for the acceleration of the empowerment process; and one of the many factors that serve as a tool for this acceleration process is that of importance of education and literature. The first tool has already been analysed in the previous chapter and so this section entirely focuses on the literature aspect. As writing and reading are the major requirements of a literary field, the content created by the authors remains meaningless unless and until it is read and reviewed by the youth and the general public. As the novels of the contemporary period showcase the issues of the present everyday life and is therefore widely read; similarly the novels of the selected authors worked as a reality check for the readers who before coming across these texts, failed to realise the discrimination going on around them. Upon reading a realistic as well as fictional work, the readers

tend to introspect which helps in the identification and removal of incessant historically organised discrimination against women in both private and public domains.

Literature thus challenges the traditional gendered codes and problematizes the exclusion and confinement of women to the private sphere while men continue dominating social, political and economic spheres. Women's literature strives to accomplish gender justice and empower women as it advances the quest for equality and women's rights, and investigates the male dominance which neglects women's dreams, desires, frustrations and struggles in a patriarchal setup. It therefore works as a platform where women's expression assists them obtain clarity, compression, undergo catharsis and finally experience joy as they get a better understanding of their psychological realms. Readers and literal enthusiasts undergo a similar process which succour them solidify their identity and acquire liberation from some of their internal and external sufferings and hindrances. It also has the potential enhancing the critical thinking abilities of the society on various issues like gender and sexuality, mutual and communal relations as it helps in transmitting one's views and observances to diverse sections of the society. Literature thus, plays a vital role in empowering women as it enhances their knowledge pertaining to the different distinctive practices among genders and empowers writers by providing them with a medium to express themselves and also the readers by allowing them access diverse ideas, perceptions and beliefs and understand ways through which they can terminate the fatal practices and attain gender justice.

4.4 Overview of the Selected Writers' Contribution to Female Empowerment

The sound of poor people weeping

Once penetrated the gates of heaven.

The Lord of the World took pity

And rained flowers on them.
 The various and beautiful flowers of heaven
 Fell to the earth;
 Here and there, where they could,
 They flowered in the groves of humanity.
 People are so mired
 That they do not love to care for flowers.
 The flowers said to God,
 “Why did you send us to man’s abode?”
 So the Lord, the sea of compassion,
 Wove a garland with the flowers fallen from heaven.
 From then on in Tarini Bhavan are found
 Daughters of the gods, the “sisters of the poor”. (Hossain 59).

Ishan, the compounder of Tarini Bhavan in *Padmarag*, recites the above phrases relating it to all the women workers of the Bhavan, who have devoted themselves and everything they possess to the Nation’s well-being. Likewise, all the three selected women writers are the “sisters of the poor” and deprived-underprivileged women who created such magnificent feminist works that invoked the people to wake up from their slumber and recognize the change that must be acquired through collective efforts. Women writers across the world have been fighting for their basic rights and right to expression is one of them. During a period when the traditions, customs, rituals and cultures were given more value than life itself, in such an era the Indian women writers had the courage to not only speak out their minds, but also to challenge and raise several unanswered questions like, Why can’t a woman acquire knowledge and skills that she desires instead of imbibing the assigned domestic skills as their *Kartavya*? Why does a

woman have to abide by all the stereotypical laws of society like chastity and monogamy while a man's criminal actions are not even considered a crime? Why isn't the nation and its practices developing their orthodox mind set when women are equally contributing to its social, political and cultural development? Why does gender-based discrimination still exist when in the first place it literally makes no sense and secondly it has always been highly subjective making the women suffer in the process?; such and many more questions are left unattended and neglected in this century too because there are states and sections of society which are underdeveloped and where the ancient conservative functioning still prevails. But the Indian women writers gathered all their intellect and posed these questions to the world through their texts which managed to crack the obliviousness and ignorant demeanour of general public. In the 19th century, Savitribai Phule, challenged the traditional laws by setting up schools in Maharashtra with her husband's assistance, yet today's youth is unaware of the reformist steps that she took which paved the way for many other emerging women reformists and writers. If one dives into the ocean of literature, her literary expression leaves one amazed and fascinated as her attempts to spread awareness extended to all the possible sections of the society. Overcoming her own disadvantages of being illiterate by acquiring education from her husband and friends, she taught hundreds of girls during a century when the Brahminical supremacy and conservative views reigned the nation. The literary archives state her struggles and efforts in abolishing discrimination on the basis of gender and caste having familiarized with her life and literature. She highly valued the British missionaries for introducing western education in India which is evident through the analysis of her poetry collection *Kaavya Phule*. The year in which the work was translated itself tells the little interest and research done on the author and her works for *Kaavya Phule* was translated just two years back by Savitribai Phule's admirer

Priyamvada Redican Chakne. Krupabai Satthianadhan was another 19th century writer who equally foregrounded the need for the abolishment of various societal practices that furthered gendered exploitation and maintained the inferior status of women since the ancient period. Having been influenced by various social reformists and their deeds, and having witnessed the oppressive conditions in which the females lived, she decided to share her thoughts and ideas with all the women by writing novels and short narrative pieces. Through her novels she portrayed the lives of women in conventional households irrespective of the religion that they belong to, relating to the fact that women's experiences have always been heart wrenching but buried under the male dominated perceptions of the society which claim women's experiences to be insignificant. She therefore empowered the women through the portrayal of strong women characters in *Kamala: A Story of Hindu life*, who challenge the rules and traditions at every point possible, foregrounding the importance of female education in the process. She provides us with her perception of an empowered woman by focusing on 'the value of women as educated and self-reliant individuals and active participants in domestic and public life.' (Rai 30). Women's identity and autonomy has been undergoing consistent change since centuries, for because of the efforts of the selected authors and other reformists can we see their position in the society developing and moving towards a positive change, yet it is important to remember that the path is way too longer and the aim too far, making the fact obvious that women are not yet completely empowered but are focused on achieving their deserved position. So we come to the 20th century writer Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, we see variation in narrative techniques through her utopian novella *Sultana's Dream* and a realistic novel *Padmarag*. 20th century brought to us the world where women realised their worth and started making space for themselves in the social sphere by choosing their careers and

voicing out their needs and expectations. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain did the same by writing the above texts where she portrays the possibility of a secular society where if women are provided their rights, they are capable of transforming the perceptions and beliefs of people through their actions. Her way of expression made her one among the early feminist writers who made women's question and quest for equality central to several social and political debates.

To conclude, in all the major chapters an attempt is made to analyse the contribution of Indian women writers to female empowerment by conducting an in depth study of selected texts. Through the process, it has been revealed that Indian women have been emerging and evolving in terms of their upbringing and opinions for a drastic change can be seen between both the centuries selected for the study. The women writers have been loyal to their psychological terrain for what they thought was important to be extended to the public, they did it with expertise and this also enabled the common masses to relate to the circumstances portrayed in the texts to that of their lives empowering themselves and the people around them in this journey of exploration.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if Indian women writers had any influence on female empowerment during a traditional era where women were solely restricted to the houses. The study began with four main research questions:

- How did Indian women writers of the 19th and 20th centuries address gender roles, subjugation and resistance in their writings?
- What role does patriarchy, religion, caste and class play in female oppression?
- In what ways do female education and literature support women's empowerment in India?
- Why is it essential to examine the works from a feminist standpoint?

The dissertation is divided into five chapters, the first and last being 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion' respectively, while the three principal chapters are "A Glimpse into the Journey of Hope: From Female Subjugation to Resistance", "A Step towards Emancipation: Analysing the Importance of Education" and "Metamorphosis of Women from Oppression to Empowerment': A Feminist Insight into the Texts". The "Introduction" consists of the aims and objectives, research questions, hypothesis, literature review, biography of the writers, synopsis of the selected primary texts, research methodology and a theoretical analysis of feminist criticism. The "Conclusion" chapter wraps up the dissertation by providing a succinct summary, limitations of the study and recommendations for further study. The study's findings have been compiled below and are based on the examination of the core chapters.

5.2 Findings

Establishing whether or not female subjugation occurred and, if it did, what the various elements responsible for the same were, is crucial to comprehending the idea of female empowerment in the Indian context. The main chapters show how the various elements that lead to gender-based discrimination interact with women's struggles against stereotypes, power structures, and societal expectations in pursuit of equality and autonomy. The subsequent chapters expound upon the ways in which Savitribai Phule, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, and Krupabai Satthianadhan, as exemplary feminist writers, contributed to the advancement of the women's liberation movement in India and fuelled their fervent pursuit of a just and equitable nation. Through their works' central themes, they have depicted the disgruntled, discontented and miserable lifestyles of Indian women. In addition to providing examples from the primary texts that artistically highlight the significance of resistance and female education in order to destroy and remove the culpable forces from their roots, both chapters extensively analyse the factors that lead to female subordination.

In the second chapter, it is examined how gender roles and subjection have changed over time and how they interact to reinforce and uphold women's subordinate status in India. It also looks at how the books *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*, *Sultana's Dream*, *Padmarag*, and *Kaavya Phule* depict the idea of subordination, which eventually leads to women's estrangement and isolation in both public and private arenas. The narrative forms of the works are strongly feministic, as they appear to be a critique of the traditional and orthodox society that combines multiple lethal practices in order to uphold male control. The chapter attempts to address psychological anguish that women experience as a result of the conservative functioning that predominates in diverse communities, as well as the oppression and alienation that women experience

from the outside world. The literary pieces depict the persistent harassment and persecution of women in diverse historical and geographical contexts. In addition, the chapter offers a thorough examination of the oppression and gender roles that the writers depict in their texts in order to comprehend the intricate gender norms, cultural expectations, and normalization of women's association with the domestic duties that are specifically assigned to them. The chapter also problematizes the practices of monogamy and polygamy, the custom of child marriages and seclusion, and oblivious attitude of women towards the wrongs done to them for the characters seem to have buried their individuality and accustomed themselves to the inferior identity. At the same time the texts showcase strong and bold characters who gather their courage, destroy their fears and fight back with strength to escape the humiliation that they have been enduring for ages. The writers therefore give a voice to their meek characters so as to spread awareness and extend the ideology of resistance to the people throughout the nation. The chapter also reproaches the customs of child marriage, seclusion, and monogamy and polygamy, as well as women's indifference to the wrongs done to them, since the characters appear to have buried their individuality and become acclimated to their inferior identities. In addition, the texts present brave and powerful individuals who muster their fortitude, face their anxieties head-on, and mount a valiant defence in order to break free from the humiliation they have been subjected to for a very long time. Thus, the authors give voice to their submissive characters in order to raise awareness and disseminate the ideology of resistance among the populace across the country.

The research on the pervasive dominant elements—such as patriarchy, religion, caste, and class distinctions—as well as the critical role that female education plays in releasing women from the bonds of these pernicious influences are covered in the third

chapter. It highlights the issues that women writers tackle in their works, including the objectification of women, infanticide, the dowry system, superstitious beliefs, the system of exclusion, caste, and class-based discrimination, all of which contribute to the unequal opportunities that women face. It also criticizes the deceptive religious stories that urge women to follow in the footsteps of Seeta and Savitri and fulfil their marital duties at all costs, regardless of the humiliation they may incur. The chapter finally focuses on the writers' emphasize the importance of education as a means of eradicating unfairness and discrimination from society and elevating marginalized women from all social classes.

The fourth chapter applies a feminist lens to the original texts in order to advance gender equality and offer a more comprehensive understanding of commonplace issues and behaviours. The chapter also emphasizes how important literature is to women's empowerment given that it raises awareness among the general public regarding the need for a balanced society in which no one is discriminated against because of their biological distinctions. It also aims at challenging traditional thinking and the gendered division of labour by criticizing male dominance and bringing up issues pertaining to women. Lastly, it summarizes the writers' contributions to female empowerment by focusing on their most important themes that were examined in order to advance gender equality in the 19th and 20th centuries.

5.3 Areas for further study

The following areas for further study were identified during the completion of this dissertation:

- The narrative styles and language of the selected works is a distinct area of study in itself.

- A field-based study can be conducted to find out the influence the selected authors had on literature students and on other writers.
- A comparative study can be done on the female and male writers of 19th and 20th century to assess the differences between the works of both the writers.

To sum up, this research has successfully proved the hypothesis that Indian women writers of the 19th and 20th centuries empowered and liberated the country's female population by writing bold literary works that emphasized the value of resistance and education while criticizing social problems and male domination.

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