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# Women Activists' Resistance and Social Change in India

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Most of the literature in social and political psychology has focused on two extremes regarding disadvantaged group members' position in society; that is, either surviving on subsistence levels or fighting to change societal structures. The overemphasis on these two extremes has given less attention to the everyday psychology of resistance. In addition, the psychological processes encompassing everyday resistance have been ignored in social and political psychology literature while examining disadvantaged group members. Thus, the present study explores the relationship between psychological and everyday resistance in the context of the women's movement in India. Furthermore, it examines the multiple forms and layers of resistance against patriarchal oppression and state violence that exist in different spheres and that activists were engaged in, beyond their activism/collective action. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyze interviews ( $N = 12$ ) with Indian women activists available on the Global Feminism database. The analysis revealed the complexities and nuances in the relationship between psychological and everyday resistance. It provides detailed insight about the importance of the context and circumstances in shaping and determining the repertoires of resistance, issues of political intentions, recognition, erasure, and silencing associated with less prototypical or subaltern forms of resistance. Overall, this work provides a detailed account of understudied forms of resistance in underexamined and non-WEIRD contexts that is, India.

### **Public Significance Statement**

This study broadens the conceptualization of psychological resistance by highlighting the relationship between everyday and psychological resistance in the context of the women's movement in India. In addition, it highlights the nonprototypical forms of resistance used in the repressive contexts.

*Keywords:* everyday resistance, psychological resistance, Indian women's history, power structure

The literature in psychology categorizes the disadvantaged at two extremes regarding their position in society—to survive at bare minimum in their daily lives for their overall psychological well-being or to fight for their disadvantage to change societal structures (Leach & Livingstone, 2015). However, individuals cannot fight all the time and disadvantaged members also engage in behaviors that help them move beyond subsistence levels. Therefore, the excessive focus of psychology on these two extremes for the disadvantaged has given less attention to everyday psychology of resistance (Haslam & Reicher, 2012). Between these two extremes lies the everyday process of giving psychological meaning to their disadvantaged conditions resulting into everyday resistance. Everyday resistance is “people acting in their everyday lives in ways that undermine power” (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 1). While the

process of assigning and deriving psychological meaning from one's disadvantaged position is psychological resistance. It is also disadvantaged opposing dominance by determining the psychological meaning of one's material disadvantage (Fanon, 1967; Gramsci, 1971; Leach & Livingstone, 2015; Martin-Baro, 1994).

Building on this theoretical understanding of psychological resistance, this paper attempts to expand the traditional conceptualization of psychological resistance (Gramsci, 1971; Leach & Livingstone, 2015) which emphasize only on determination of psychological meaning of one's material disadvantage. The present paper argues that disadvantaged members derive psychological meanings (such as but not limited to experiencing threat to their identity, morality, agency, safety, community and religious values, survival, freedom, self-respect, dignity, and human values) not only from material (economic) disadvantage but also from other aspects of disadvantaged conditions, such as social, emotional, and physical. The psychological meanings derived from their disadvantaged conditions act as a force to practice the everyday acts of resistance against domination and authority. This alternative understanding of psychological resistance against all aspects of the disadvantaged conditions and disadvantaged as agentic individuals challenge the typical notion in the social psychology literature focusing only on the negative psychological impact on individuals because of their disadvantaged conditions (see reviews Barreto & Ellemers, 2010; Major et al., 2002). Recent attempts have been made to analyze the diversity of ways in which disadvantage can be resisted psychologically (Pratto et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2012; Sweetman

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et al., 2013; van Zomeren et al., 2012), but they are limited and need further exploration. The paper argues that disadvantaged group members actively resist their disadvantage, domination, and authority both psychologically as well as behaviorally through everyday acts of resistance.

Everyday resistance is the form of resistance practiced in everyday lives. Every day resistance is a *practice* (neither a certain consciousness, intent, recognition, nor outcome), is historically *entangled* with everyday power and not considered as separated, dichotomous, or independent, and needs to be considered as *intersectional* because of the engagement with the multiple powers. Furthermore, everyday resistance is *heterogenic* and *contingent* due to changing contexts and situations (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Disadvantaged group members engage in everyday acts of resistance to oppression to assert and reclaim their agency, integrity, self-esteem, and power by challenging and rejecting hierarchical structures in society. Psychological resistance is an essential component of everyday resistance as disadvantaged are likely first to resist oppression and domination cognitively, that is rejection and disapproval of the values and cultural hegemony of dominant groups and status quo followed by everyday behavioral actions of resistance. However, both forms of resistance are likely to coincide, or the everyday actions of resistance occurring before psychological resistance and vice versa depending upon the context and circumstances. The core of psychological resistance (Leach & Livingstone, 2015), as well as everyday resistance (Rosales & Langhout, 2020; Scott, 1990; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013) is to oppose domination which also informs the possibility of their simultaneous occurrence or one after the other. Psychologically, disadvantaged members resist by cognitively refusing to accept the values of dominant members and continue using their values, traditions, and rituals. This psychological resistance is manifested by behaviorally practicing their own social/cultural values, rituals, and traditions, questioning and challenging authority, status quo, and oppression. Thus, the present paper attempts to expand the traditional conceptualization of psychological resistance by examining the diversity, complexity, and nuances in the relationship between psychological and everyday resistance in the context of the women's movement in India. I also argue through findings of this paper that the psychology of disadvantaged is not dependent on the psychology of advantaged. Disadvantaged individuals actively resist against domination and authority while constructing their own psychological meanings of their social position(s) and disadvantaged conditions.

In "tight spaces" (Cruz, 2014, 2016), individuals may engage in everyday off-stage practices of resistance that might or might not be visible to those in positions of power or privilege. Tight spaces are basically constricted spaces formulated by domination, where people who are marginalized find it hard to move against the dominant and powerful forces whether they are powerful people or social structures (Cruz, 2014, 2016; Lugones, 2003). Individuals in tight spaces utilize different forms of everyday resistance to show noncompliance to oppressive structures, thus reclaiming their sense of agency, power, autonomy, and boosting their psychological well-being. The literature in social and political psychology has paid attention to very limited and specific forms of resistance such as organized and collective actions such as protests and mass movements (Blackwood et al., 2013; van Zomeren et al., 2012). However, resistance takes on many forms and dimensions and individuals in

oppressive conditions engage in many other less prototypical and diverse forms of resistance such as everyday resistance, cultural/symbolic, and psychological resistance (Vollhardt et al., 2020; Rosales & Langhout, 2020) that are rarely covered in social and political psychology literatures (Haslam & Reicher, 2012; Tuck, 2009; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Furthermore, the traditional violence, oppression, and feminist literature usually emphasize powerlessness, lack of agency, and poor psychological well-being for disadvantaged group members particularly women of third world countries, e.g., India (Abraham, 2000; Maguigan, 1995; for exceptions, see Castrén, 2019; Rawat et al., 2021). Therefore, to fill these gaps, it is crucial to examine how resistance looks like in repressive and tight contexts in general. Thus, this study sheds light on multiple forms and layers of resistance that exist in different spheres and that women activists are engaged in beyond their activism in the understudied context of the women's movement in India.

### Multiple Forms of Resistance

Within the growing field of resistance studies, multiple definitions of resistance are found based on several factors. The literature in this paper focuses on the general definitions of resistance and unorganized, nonprototypical and understudied forms of resistance in social and political psychology such as cultural, symbolic, psychological, and everyday resistance (Rosales & Langhout, 2020; Scott, 1990; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013; Vollhardt et al., 2020). Some of the factors considered widely within the field for defining resistance are aims, goals, intent and some form of interest related to resistance action. For example, some scholars defined resistance by emphasizing intent and aims as "actions involving consciousness, intent, collective action, and direct challenges to structures of power" (Rubin, 1996, p. 245). Another general conceptualization of resistance is "either any kind of organized, collective opposition or any subversive action directly intended to damage and/or disrupt the functioning of an organization" (Prasad & Prasad, 1998, p. 226). Therefore, resistance could be summarized and understood as a response to power that could challenge, negotiate, and undermine it. Irrespective of intent or interest, it can be considered as (a) an act performed by someone occupying subordinate position or in solidarity with people or groups in a subordinate position (b) usually responding to power (Baaz et al., 2016, p. 25). However, other scholars in the field of resistance studies suggest that resistance, particularly everyday resistance can occur without any intention and recognition by targets and observers (Rosales & Langhout, 2020; Scott, 1990; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013).

When disadvantaged group members are dissatisfied with the way how the state, institutions treat them, and social structures, they engage in different forms of resistance to showing noncompliance with authority and expressing their anger and disagreement with dominant values, principles, and beliefs. Within the resistance studies, we find different distinctions of resistance. However, most common ones are based on the organized nature of resistance, challenging power, e.g., protests, demonstrations, and boycotts that are termed collective action. Since the paper focuses on less prototypical forms of resistance (e.g., psychological, everyday, and cultural/symbolic), the literature relevant to these forms of resistance is addressed and included in this paper.

## Everyday Resistance

The term “everyday resistance” covers different forms of resistance that are not organized, intentional and visible as riots, protests, demonstrations, social movements, and civil wars. It is defined as “prosaic, informal, mundane and unorganized actions of resistance” (Scott, 1985, 1989, 1990). Another scholar defined everyday resistance as “people acting in their everyday lives in ways that undermine power” and “resistance that is done “routinely” but which is *not politically articulated or formally organized* (yet or in that situation)” (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Everyday resistance can be differentiated from organized public protests, social movements where protesters make direct demands; acts are always intentional with the sole focus on collective and organized acts of resistance. In contrast, Scott (1990) argues that there are different resistance strategies other than organized, intentional and visible acts (e.g., saying “no” to domination, gossiping, discussing with support groups, confronting abusers, silence, wearing symbolic dressing or jewelry) used by people to undermine power and for questioning and challenging domination which are the main motives and purpose of everyday resistance. It can be small scale, relatively safe, individual, or collective, unorganized, unintentional, might require formal or no formal coordination and context dependent (Scott, 1989). It constitutes an initial, off stage or later stage activity in relationship with other more sustained, organized, and traditional political forms of resistance. Therefore, it goes on *between or at the side of* the dramatic resistance events. These different techniques and forms of everyday resistance are considered “first resort” in most historical conditions where open defiance is impossible or entails mortal danger. Everyday resistance is considered a practice and not a certain consciousness, intent, recognition, or outcome. It is intersectional as engaging with multiple power relations simultaneously and heterogenic and contingent due to changing contexts and situations (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 18).

It is also essential to consider that everyday resistance happens in other spaces and times; thus, it becomes the silent, mundane, ordinary, and everyday acts that are normalized. Thus, there is a possibility that actors themselves are not necessarily labeling it as “resistance” at all. Instead, they are normal part and way of their life, personality, culture, rituals, and tradition (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2009). Everyday resistance is a form of activity that often avoids being recognized and detected as resistance. Nevertheless, it might also be made *invisible* by society, by not being recognized as resistance. Actors of everyday resistance can also promote power loaded discourses, being the bearers of hierarchies and stereotypes and the agents of change. Hence, each actor is both the subject and object of the power. Thus, everyday resistance and all other forms of resistance are always situated, in a particular context, a historical tradition, a specific place or social place framed by those who resist or rebel (Lilja, 2008). In addition, there is no *particular* intention or consciousness of the actor (e.g., Scott, 1990) or recognition by the targets of resistance (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004) mandatory to detect or consider it as “everyday resistance.” It is the resistance act, the agency in itself or the *way of acting/doing* that matters. Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) argue that no particular outcome or effect is mandatory or necessary; just the *potential* of undermining power is vital for everyday resistance. They also suggest that discourse and context are essential while analyzing everyday resistance. Through power discourses situated in certain contexts, power

and resistance are framed and understood in which actors make sense of themselves and understand their social positions and identities.

In “tight spaces” (Cruz, 2014, 2016) and contexts, individuals are likely to engage in everyday practices of resistance that might or might not be visible to those in positions of power or privilege. Such techniques are often relatively safe with minimal physical or verbal harm, often promising material gains and requiring little to no formal coordination. Everyday acts of resistance challenge the prototypical forms of “resistance” like organized resistance (e.g., protests, demonstrations). It is broader in scope as it encompasses less prototypical forms such as mundane, small, subversive, cultural/symbolic acts of resistance that might be with or without any clear intentions, visibility, and recognizability by targets and observers. In addition, these forms of resistance are usually under examined in the social and political psychology literature (Leach & Livingstone, 2015; Rosales, & Langhout, 2020; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2014) thus neglect the capacity and possibility for individuals to engage in resistance in various nonprototypical forms of resistance. However, there are some studies in psychology addressing everyday resistance, but those emphasize on other areas (e.g., higher education, disability, intimate partner violence, and infertility) and mostly with WEIRD samples (Black et al., 2020; Casado Pérez, 2019; Frederick, 2017; Riessman, 2000).

Usually, it is hard to measure and observe everyday acts of resistance due to their subversive nature, small scale, lacking clear intention and less reporting of such acts by individuals either because these are normalized as ways of their life or not fitting into the dominant/mainstream frameworks (Leblanc, 1999; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001) of “resistance.” These everyday acts of resistance can be carried out individually and collectively and can inform organized political movements (Kelley, 1993). Everyday resistance allows us to understand the different options and strategies available to individuals to resist in toxic and tight environments best-suited to the power relations in a particular context. It further allows us to see the disadvantaged individuals and groups in oppressive contexts with the different lenses as “agentic” individuals who actively resist and challenge domination and authority. Moreover, such an alternative understanding and lens of viewing disadvantaged as active members help to dismantle the already prevalent stereotypes and regressive myths in mainstream literature (Ferraro, 2003; Follingstad, 2003; Rothenberg, 2003), considering disadvantaged individuals as passive victims lacking power and control over their lives. This alternative understanding of disadvantaged challenges the typical binary of “powerful” and “powerless” in mainstream social and political psychology literature.

## Psychological Resistance

It is defined as “the myriad ways in which the disadvantaged assert and practice their view of themselves and the world despite dominant pressures to accept societal messages” (Leach & Livingstone, 2015). Different scholars (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Gramsci, 1971; Raby, 2005; Scott, 1990) view psychological resistance to disadvantage comes in several forms, variation of how overt/covert and active/passive it is. The feature that unites different forms of psychological resistance is opposition to dominance (Fanon, 1967; Martin-Baro, 1994), that they are active, at times

subtle, covert, and resist material disadvantage in psychological terms instead of material terms of confrontational protests and social movements to directly inform and change societal structures. However, this traditional conceptualization of psychological resistance (Gramsci, 1971; Leach & Livingstone, 2015) is narrow and limited as it only focuses on resisting material (economic) disadvantage while neglecting other aspects of disadvantage (for example, social, cultural, emotional—threat to identity, morality, agency, and cultural/community/religious values) and its relationship with other forms of resistance particularly everyday resistance.

Psychological resistance is considered the clear form of opposition and practical demonstration of power, because in circumstances of extreme violence, oppression, structural disadvantages, and political marginalization disadvantaged people can have the most control over the psychological meaning of their position in the face of disadvantage. It allows the disadvantaged to refuse internalization of material disadvantage and to think beyond it. Psychological resistance is likely to be a more common form of resistance than the direct protest to disadvantage (Gramsci, 1971) particularly in repressive contexts where there is the least possibility for the disadvantaged to confront power structures directly. It is also argued that in the face of “cultural dominance,” disadvantaged must be very strategic in their engagement to counter the hegemony by advantaged by pursuing their cultural values. It is a strategic and multifaceted form of resistance that aims to free the disadvantaged from hegemony and domination. It is a long process that can inform and lead to direct protests when needed and allowed by circumstances (Fanon, 1967; Gramsci, 1971).

The material disadvantage in mainstream literature is seen as linked to causing physical and psychological damage in the form of lower self-esteem, lack of agency and power physical and psychological well-being, stress and illness among individuals and groups (See Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 1999). Although, negative consequences are not always necessary outcomes because of the disadvantaged conditions. It is possible and highly likely that disadvantaged members take their disadvantage as a force that pushes them to resist, reject and challenge hierarchies, domination, and status quo (Rosales & Langhout, 2020; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). The current work thus attempts to expand the conceptualization, nuances, and complexities surrounding psychological resistance and its relationship with everyday resistance.

### **Background Events Leading to Women’s Movement in India**

The women’s movement in India has a history of over hundred years. It went from many waves, from united force to segregation, dispersal and now perhaps, a new hope for unity is in the process. Past literature has been full of studies of poets, saints, activists, of matrilinear customs and practices that later were made part of patriarchal structures, or of women’s participation in peasant and working class struggles (Gwynne, 2012; Loomba, 1990; Misra, 1997). These writings challenge the chauvinist, misogynist, and patriarchal notion about a pro-woman “Indian culture,” that since the 19th century has been used to assert in the name of nationalism, was the most male supremacist element of Indian culture. Colonialism strengthened the indigenous/local patriarchal structures operating at that time in Indian society and introduced new ones as well. The atrocities and violence carried against Indian women were the

main moral ground and legitimacy for the civilizing mission of colonial rulers. Child marriages, forced marriages, rape, early widowhood, sati (the burning of a widow at the funeral of the husband), tonsuring of widow’s head were some of the oppressive and cruel conditions that high-caste Hindu women suffered from (Krishnaraj, 2012). As a result, the social reform movement led by Indian urban elite men was initiated with the purpose of women emancipation, particularly “urban, elite women.”

The social reform movement to improve the social conditions of women was carried by those men who were exposed to liberal ideas, considered these conditions as an imputation of their society by colonial rulers and spearheaded the legislation by increasing the age of consent for marriage, abolition of sati practices, and campaigned for allowance of widow remarriage especially when she had no children. They also widely campaigned for women’s education. It is generally assumed that men were the main or primary drivers behind the emancipation of women. However, some studies also show that wives, daughters, and sisters of these male leaders were equally in the front line in this movement (Kumar, 1997). It highlights the need to reanalyze or re-evaluate the history with the different lenses focusing on women’s role and, how diverse resistance actions of women both on an individual and collective level contributed to bringing change in social conditions for women in India. The fervor/passion in the social reform movement to improve the living conditions for high caste women was noteworthy. However, still this reform was limited in a sense that women were still restricted to their traditional roles as wives, mothers and education were supposed to make them better wives and mothers, so that they can be knowledgeable, and enlightened partners for their husbands. These reforms did not envision any public change for women (Gabriele, 1992).

The discriminations and inequalities in the social reform movement set the foundations for the women movement in India, where women from all castes, classes, and religions came together and campaigned for the women rights and issues. Women as a part of this movement were fighting for their right to education, safety, work, well-being, oppressive patriarchal customs, widow burning, sati, child marriages, rape, sexual assault, property inheritance, inclusion in social and political processes, caste-based discrimination, inclusive and protective laws for women and female child burning (Uma, 1998). Due to increasing awareness of social evils and issues, women started resisting hegemony, patriarchal oppression and dominance of ruling elites and status quo. They demanded accountability for the violence that has been happening against women for years and equal representation in social, political, and cultural affairs (Sen, 2000). The women psychologically questioned, challenged authority, patriarchal norms/values, rejected caste and class-based hierarchies, actively fought against these menaces starting from their homes and brought these issues to streets in the form of hunger strikes, large-scale protests, and demonstrations. Thus, women resisted oppression psychologically as well as behaviorally by employing multiple strategies and acts of resistance. This also goes against the typical notion prevalent in contemporary feminist discourses (Abraham, 2000; Gallin, 1994; Maguigan, 1995) as well as in the local Indian and political discourses (Kumar, 1993; Pande, & Kameshwari, 1987) viewing women in India (and in other third world countries) as passive victims and lacking agency in their liberation—that do not resist in spaces of oppression while in reality, women in India resisted

actively and in myriad ways and passionately contributed to women movement in India.

Therefore, researchers need to analyze the women's movement in India as well as globally with a different lens shedding light on the contributions, active role, and resistance of women against oppression. As in past literature, the description of women movement in India is only loaded with oppression that women faced during the movement. It is rarely examined how women activists resisted this oppression using multiple forms of resistance (e.g., Renu, 1980; Srimati, 1999; Uma, 1998). Furthermore, the mainstream literature on resistance in social and political psychology (Jost et al., 2004; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; van Zomeren et al., 2004, 2008a, 2008b, van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009) comes mostly from WEIRD, democratic, western/liberal contexts and there is a pressing need in the field to center the voices of marginalized groups and communities (Bulhan, 2015; Montiel, 2018) from oppressive contexts such as India and broadly from the Global South in resistance studies. In the tight context such as India, where high risk activism particularly for women was not possible at that time due to widely prevalent patriarchy, casteism, classism, hegemonic cultural traditions/norms/values and brutal legal system, it is important to study how resistance from disadvantaged members looks like. Building on this contextual and theoretical understanding and standpoint of everyday resistance and psychological resistance the present study aims to (a) explore the nuances in multiple forms and layers of resistance that exist in different spheres and that women activists were engaged in beyond their activism/collective action (b) the relationship between psychological and everyday resistance in the context of women movement in India.

## Method

### Sample and Procedure

The interviews of 12 women were available on the Global Feminism project—India database (<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/globalfeminisms/interviews/india/>), and researcher has used all interviews in this research. This project investigates the histories of the women movements in different parts of the world and the role of women activists in these movements. These interviews from Indian women were carried out in the early 2000s, and four of the women from these interviews were born in the 1920s and 1930s who played a significant role in shaping the early women activism in India. Other interviews were from women born in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s who led these women movements further and gave direction to Indian feminism and took it abroad as well. The interviewees discussed a variety of social issues such as gender-based violence, rape, domestic violence, motherhood customs, patriarchal norms, women's education and featured academic and artistic work of these women. University of Michigan carried out this project, C. S Lakshmi and her colleagues interviewed women activists in India and two of them at University of Michigan between 2003 and 2005. The interviews were audio and video recorded and are made publicly available in English language on the project's website. The main aim of the Global Feminism project was to document the history of the freedom struggle in India and women's participation in it. Furthermore, it also shed light on the activism and outcomes of women's movement in India in different domains such as legal aid, advocacy, general awareness regarding gender-based violence,

health, economic disparities, identity, caste, religion, and politics of expression. All women in this sample have used multiple forms of resistance against oppression in their personal and public lives. To contextualize the data, participants' sociodemographic information, including social class, occupation, marital status, city of birth, education, religion, forms of resistance used, focus area(s) of their work and organizations that they developed because of their community activism, as reported in Table 1.

### Analytic Procedure

Reflexive thematic analysis was used for analyzing interviews to identify, analyze, and report the patterns within data that respond to research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was chosen as the best possible choice for analysis as it provides a flexible and valuable research tool with a solid potential to provide a rich, detailed, and complex account of data. It allows for a theoretical freedom and works best with different (e.g., essentialist and constructionist) paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within psychology as the current research aims to "explore the complexities and nuances in the layers and forms of resistance that have been employed and relationship between psychological and everyday resistance" within the context of women movement in India. Thus, the decision of using reflexive thematic analysis was made and considered as best-suited for this work because of several reasons (a) the theoretical flexibility that it provides to the researcher and for analysis (b) the sample size for current research is more significant than ten individuals (c) the analytic focus is on identifying themes across the data set and describing, interpreting, and analyzing those patterns (d) to provide a theoretically informed interpretation of them and (e) how experiences relevant to research questions and interests are located within a wider sociocultural context (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The reflexive thematic analysis involves six phases that are familiarization, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing, developing themes, refining, defining, naming themes, and writing up.

The researcher in this work is also utilizing "constructionist" paradigm where the researcher plays an active role in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest and relevant to research question, interpreting according to the researcher's theoretical frameworks, and reporting them to the readers (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). The "constructionist" method examines how events, realities, meanings, experiences, and their effects of a range of discourses operating within society. The deductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013) within the thematic analysis was also employed and the researcher drew on social and political psychology literatures on resistance, psychological, and everyday resistance (Leach & Livingstone, 2015; Rosales & Langhout, 2020; Scott, 1985, 1989, 1990; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013) to understand and interpret psychological meanings derived from disadvantaged conditions and multiple forms and layers of resistance in this context. It involves reading the transcripts for ideas speaking directly to our theoretical framework addressing psychological and everyday resistance and an open and flexible reading in different ways in which activists described their actions directly or indirectly linked to everyday, psychological resistance and other less prototypical forms of resistance. Furthermore, it involves the active role of the researcher in interpreting psychological motivations, and meanings associated with forms of resistance that have been employed as informed by the researcher's theoretical frameworks. Initial themes were generated by overlapping codes

**Table 1**  
*Participants' Sociodemographic Characteristics*

Participant name	DOB/year of birth	Social class/occupation	Caste/ethnicity	Marital status	Education	Religion	City of birth/place of growing up	Forms of resistance	Focus areas/keywords	Organization
1. Shahjehan Aapa	1946	Working class	NM	Married	Madrassa (religious education)	Islam/Muslim	Delhi	Initially covert but later more overt resistance	Gender based violence, Community activism	Shalini Shakti, 1987
2. Flavia Agnes	1947	Middle class/Women rights' lawyer & writer	NM	Married/Was thrown out of house by husband	Doctorate in progress at the time of interview, 2003	Christian	Mangalore	Covert initially but later overt (community activism)	Politics, law, intersectionality	Coordinating Legal center MAJLIS
3. Urvasi butalia	1952	Middle class/Writer & civil rights activist	Punjabi	Single	Masters	Sikhism	Ambala/Delhi	Majorly overt (writings, protests)	Academia and women studies, art as activism, intersectionality	Cofounder Kali for women Zubaan—feminist publishing house Research Center for Women Studies in SINDT Women University Forum: Bortika
4. Neera Desai	1925	Middle class, educated & upper caste	Upper caste (Brahmin)	Married/love marriage	Masters	Hindu	Gujarat/Bombay	Both covert and overt	Academia and Women studies	Research Center for Women Studies in SINDT Women University Forum: Bortika
5. Mahasweta Devi	1926	Educated, middle class, Communist	NM	Married but later left her husband	MA in English	Hindu	East side of India connected with Bengal-Medimpur	Covert (majorly writings about marginalized women, dispossessed segments of society but with light language)	Art as activism	Forum: Bortika
6. Ina Thokchom Ramani Devi	1930	Poor, General Secretary of Samaj	Belong fromMeitei community	Married	Primary	Hindu	Loklaobung, Moirangkhom/Thongam Leikal	Overt (protests)	Gender based violence, family roles	Samaj—Women's Social Reformation Development Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society
7. Jarjum Ete	1963	Middle class, Chairperson of the Arunachal Pradesh State Commission	Belong from Galo tribe of Arunachal Pradesh	Married	Masters in English Literature	Hindu	Along	Both covert and overt	Community activism, politics, law, intersectionality, human trafficking, prostitution	National convener for the National Alliance of People's Movements Key person in theatre group "Voice Silencing"
8. Lata Pratibha Madhukar	1955	Middle class, Writer, poet, Lecturer and anchorperson	Belong from Barai community	Married	Post graduate degree in Marathi	Hindu	Nagpur	Overt mainly (protests, strikes) but sometimes covert too	Academia, women studies and gender-based violence	National convener for the National Alliance of People's Movements Key person in theatre group "Voice Silencing"
9. Mangai	1959	Middle class, Theatre director and Professor of English Literature	NM	NM	Masters in English Literature	Hindu	Nagapatnam	Mostly covert through theatre—use of art for raising women and social issues	Art as activism, theatre	Key person in theatre group "Voice Silencing"

Table 1 (continued)

Participant name	DOB/year of birth	Social class/occupation	Caste/ethnicity	Marital status	Education	Religion	City of birth/place of growing up	Forms of resistance	Focus areas/keywords	Organization
10. Vina Mazumdar	1927	Educated Middle class, Professor and Chairperson	Bengali	NM	Honors and D.Phil	Hindu	Kolkata	Both covert and overt through writings and setting up center for women studies	Academia/women's studies, rural women and land reform, policy, law	Centre for Women's Development Studies
11. D. Sharifa	1966	Middle class, Activist	NA	Single	Graduation	Islam	Kulithalai	Both covert and overt	Intersectionality	STEPS in Tamilnadu
12. Ruth Vanita	1955	Middle class, Author, Poet and professor at the University of Montana	NA	NM	Doctorate	Born Christian but chose to be Hindu	Burma	Both covert and overt	Education, gender-based violence, LGBTQ rights, community activism, academia	Founding coeditor of Manushi—India's first feminist journal

with similar content, separating those with significant differences, and categorizing thematic nuances into subthemes.

The author generated, reviewed, and refined the initial themes and contributed as an “analytic auditor” (Elliott et al., 1999) and then again reviewed the codes and themes to ensure that themes accurately represent the codes. The level at which themes were identified was “latent”. The thematic analysis at the latent level examines the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualization, and ideologies that shape or inform the semantic content of the data (Boyatzis, 1998).

The resistance actions of women activists in their daily lives, whether they are individual or collective, direct, or indirect, with or without intention (Scott, 1990), recognized or unrecognized by targets or observers, with or without any outcome (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013), but have the potential of undermining power are considered as “everyday resistance” in the present work. While for psychological resistance researcher actively interpreted data informed by theoretical frameworks on psychological resistance (Leach & Livingstone, 2015; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Gramsci, 1971) and identified, generated possible psychological meanings (e.g., a threat to their individual or group identity, efficacy, agency, morality or to their kin, loss of religious or community values, feelings of anger and awareness of disadvantage) associated with their disadvantaged conditions and resistance actions.

The author was born and raised in Pakistan, which is a neighboring country to India. Pakistan and India (Indo-Pak subcontinent) were one country before the independence of the region in 1947. Thus, both countries (Pakistan and India) have almost similar cultural values, norms, and traditions. The researcher's familiarity with the history of India, culture, command of local national languages (Hindi and Urdu), proficiency in English, and in-depth context knowledge helped her in understanding and interpreting the nuances in the data. Thus, the researcher acknowledges her own theoretical positions, values, and subjectivity in interpreting data and considers it a resource for research, of meaning and knowledge as partial, situated, and contextual (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

## Findings

The present study aimed to examine the nuances in multiple forms and layers of resistance in different spheres that women activists were engaged in beyond their activism and the relationship between psychological and everyday resistance in the context of the women's movement in India. Thus, keeping in mind these aims, the researcher identified and generated three overarching themes speaking to women activists' resistance to patriarchal oppression in society and state violence with related subthemes: breaking cultural norms, solidarity, and alliance and cultural/symbolic resistance. These themes manifest nuances in psychological meanings (such as but not limited to a perceived threat to agency, efficacy, and threats to morality, individual or group identity, loss of community and religious values, anger, undermining of their concerns, political, social and cultural exclusion/discrimination, and awareness of disadvantage) derived from disadvantaged conditions leading to multiple forms of resistance practiced by the women activists. In some instances, the resistance started on a personal level with a strong desire to break their own vicious cycle of violence and express their agency and power to resisting against oppression. For some women activists, their resistance to patriarchal oppression and status quo prevalent in different domains (e.g., home, work, and community) was initiated before their engagement in the



women movement, while in other cases, resistance started after formally getting involved in the women movement in India. The generated themes with their sub themes (thematic map) are visually presented in Figure 1.

**Breaking Cultural Norms**

Consistent with research on everyday resistance (Rosales & Langhout, 2020; Scott, 1985, 1989, 1990), majority of women activists expressed the starting point of their activism on a personal level from individual acts of resistance against patriarchal oppression influencing their interpersonal relationships (e.g., relationship with husband and close family members). The primary psychological motivation of resistance on a personal level was to free themselves from the vicious cycle of violence, hegemonic gender roles, patriarchal cultural narratives, and ideologies controlling their bodies and lives. The resistance on microlevel started from awareness of their disadvantaged conditions that have been affecting their personal lives which eventually became the prime impetus behind the resistance. As a result of this awareness and anger towards patriarchal oppression, these woman activists questioned and challenged the hegemonic cultural norms/values restricting their mobility, choices, agency, way of living, and livelihood opportunities. One

participant shared her husband’s disapproval for her participation in a women conference and threatened her of severe consequences in case of attending a conference.

So, in the conference, I was presenting this study and that’s the time my husband said, “You will not go for the conference, and I said, “I will.” So, he says, “But I will take the daughters and I will send my son to my sister’s house, so you have no responsibility.” So, I mean he didn’t give his consent but that didn’t matter. So, I went for the conference. (Flavia Agnes).

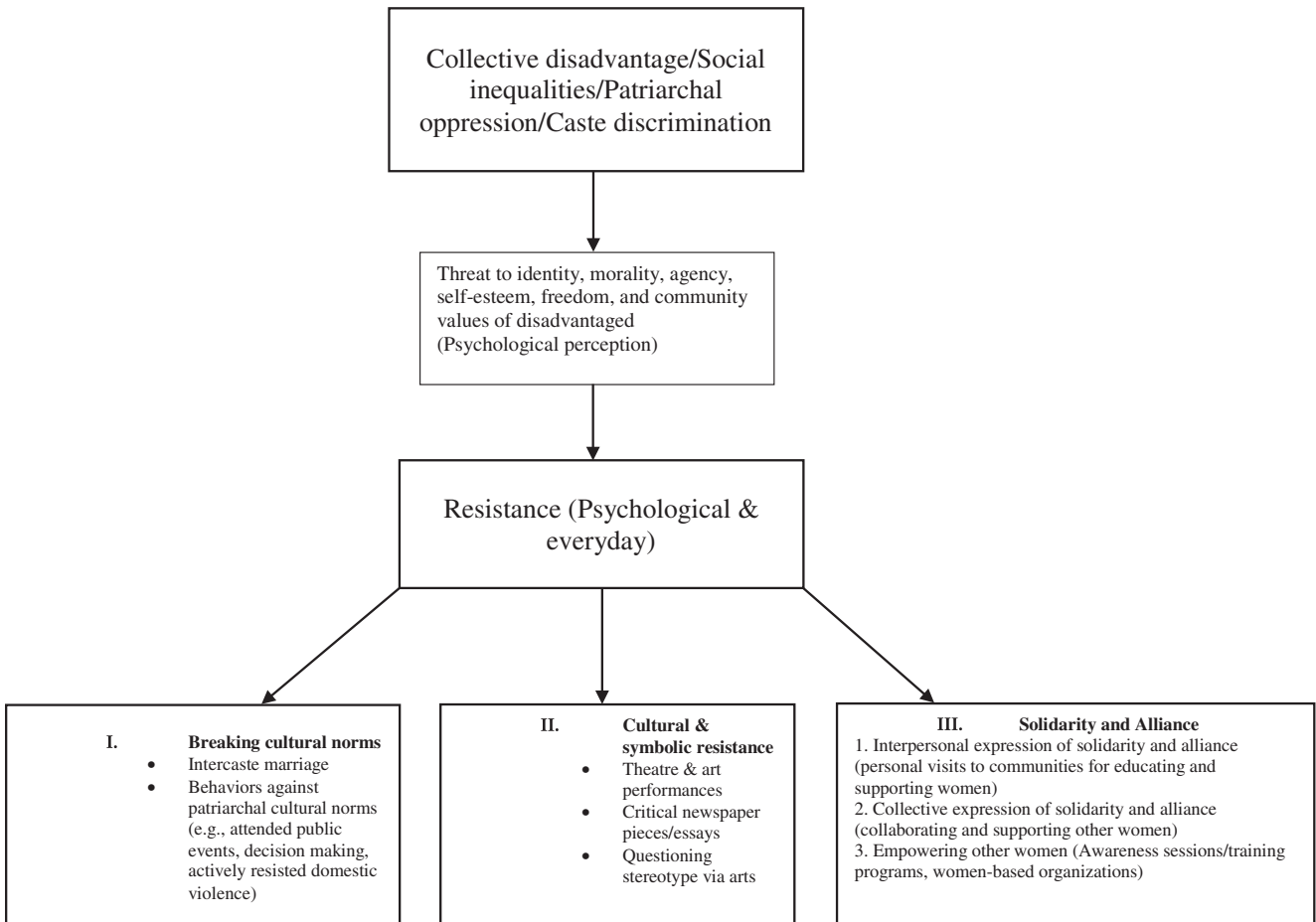
Nevertheless, this woman activist attended the conference as an act of resistance against patriarchal oppression, hegemonic cultural norms, and the typical binary of private—public divide for women limiting their agency, freedom and restricting them to private spaces.

In another instance, she reported leaving her husband’s house after having a heated argument with him.

So, it was a very violent scene. He even threw that typewriter that I had borrowed from Meera Savara at me. It fell down. It broke. I walked out. He said, “Take your children and go. Take your daughters. I said, “No I will not take my daughters. The daughters are yours; they will stay. I will work.” He said, “Either you stay in the house and not work, or you walk out and work.” “The choice is to go out and work, I will not stay here.” (. . .). I walked out with the children (Flavia Agnes).

**Figure 1**

*Themes and Subthemes (Thematic Map) of Psychological and Everyday Resistance in the Context of Women’s Movement in India*



Another activist shared throwing pebbles at people when they were taking away a little girl for a forced marriage.

I had picked up some pebbles and I was throwing at those people who were dragging her away, you know, that was a real kind of, you know, touching scene I still can visualise; it's fresh as the same day, after all these years, may be about thirty-five-thirty-six years (Jarjum Ete)

Furthermore, one woman activist shared asking her husband to leave house along with his second wife.

When he brought the second wife, I wasn't comfortable staying with them. So I asked him to leave the house with the second wife saying, I don't want to see them (Ima Thockshom Ravani Devi).

Moreover, some women activists expressed going to courts and police stations to fight women's issues despite strong disapproval from their families. For example, one woman activist shared,

And many times, I was beaten up for that. One day he hit me saying, "Aren't you ashamed, you go to courts and police stations?" I said, "Aren't you ashamed that you stay at home and still can't take care of the house, how will you go out and help anybody else?" I was very angry that day. He used to beat me every day. That day I beat him up too (Shahjehan Aapa).

Another highly prevalent issue in India is caste discrimination and inequality. Intercaste marriages are not acceptable, penalized and individuals violating this norm are subjected to severe consequences. One participant shared, "So, ours was an inter-caste marriage. So, it's like a clean break from my family" (Lata Pratibha Madhukar).

Although, the resistance acts in the above incidents were interpersonal in nature and occurred in the private sphere as part of their everyday lives, but these acts psychologically and behaviorally challenged the power structures, patriarchal oppression, heteronationalism, and hierarchical inequalities. Psychologically, they experienced a threat to their agency, identity, freedom, and morality, which resulted into behavioral response towards oppression in the form of resistance. Thus, all the above everyday acts of resistance by women activists are powerful manifestations of challenging the hegemonic ideologies and cultural norms silencing women's voices, limiting their agency, and restricting their bodies to private spheres. These actions also challenged the popular discourse of womanhood that encourages women to show obedience to their husbands and elders in all matters as well as rejection of the "powerless victim" narrative (Salehi et al., 2020; Leisenring, 2006) by actively resisting the oppression. It is important to consider that in the tight, ongoing conflict, and repressive settings, e.g., India; it is difficult for certain groups or individuals (e.g., women and minorities) to resist via collective action. In such contexts, disadvantaged individuals are likely to resort to less confrontational forms of resistance such as but not limited to indirect, symbolic and cultural resistance that are discussed in next theme.

### Cultural and Symbolic Resistance

This theme looks at the indirect, specific cultural and symbolic actions and forms of resistance used by women activists. Broadly, the resistance actions covered under this theme violate oppressive cultural norms. Since women activists used symbolic art forms that is why these specific actions of resistance are included in this theme.

They used diverse techniques of resistance such as writing newspaper articles, books, publishing pieces in magazines, street plays, and theatre. The acts of resistance, in this case, were not confrontational and explicitly dismantling power structures. However, their impact contributed to undermining and challenging systems of oppression while simultaneously motivating others to question authority. The women activists resisting via cultural and symbolic art forms were cognitively as well as behaviorally questioning and challenging the hegemonic heterosexuality—typical binaries of gender, oppressive masculinity, dominant ideologies, narratives of patriarchy and caste discrimination contributing to social, political, cultural exclusion of women, minorities, and marginalized communities. They challenged the dominant narratives of caste and gender superiority by presenting alternatives to it via theatrical performance. One of the participants shared,

So mainly I think it was Buddhism and especially the character Manimekalai. At one go she was actually giving alternative to caste as well as the problem of gender as it is constructed in a patriarchal society (. . . .). So, that was how we struck on Manimekalai (Lata Pratibha Madhukar).

Furthermore, the women activists questioned the hegemonic stereotype and patriarchal belief of woman being not "wise" especially young woman. For example,

Ya, I think being wise was fine, you know. I mean, if somebody calls a woman wise, that's ok. But then I think this whole connection between "she was wise because she was old" or at least greyed, not necessarily old, that connection which really caused, I think, a little bit of unease perhaps (Lata Pratibha Madhukar).

Other activist shared questioning and challenging the state, e.g., "But in a . . . in a strange kind of way, the early movement, also as you quite rightly say, addressed the State. So, it was a . . . in an essay that I wrote, I called it "Confrontation and Negotiation," because we continue to confront the State, but we also continue to collaborate with it, to negotiate with it" (Urvashi Butalia).

Another activist shared writing the biography of "Rani of Jhansi" as an act of resistance against the forces trying to silence the women's voices, for keeping the indigenous culture and courageous stories of women alive, and inspiring younger women for engaging in resistance and mass mobilization against patriarchal oppression. She shared,

Yes, I have read about her in childhood, in my grandma's library, in other books, other book reference to her. Rabindranath's elder brother referred to her all the time. Only that day, the Rani of Jhansi, she has proved her courage and resilience and things like that. Anyway, I read that book, I decided to write a biography (Mahasweta Dewi).

The cultural and symbolic acts of resistance under this theme were an important part of their everyday lives. Broadly, the above acts of resistance psychologically and behaviorally challenged the colonial and postcolonial discourse of heteronationalism, hegemonic masculinity, patriarchal oppression, gender, and caste discrimination. Theoretically, this theme broadens the mainstream conceptualization of resistance by shedding light on application and impact of less prototypical and confrontational forms of resistance such as symbolic and cultural resistance in everyday lives in undermining, questioning and challenging power structures.

## Solidarity and Alliance

This theme refers to building support and alliances with other groups to fight for the women issues and injustices experienced by marginalized groups. The women activists were regularly meeting other women, women-based groups and women run organizations with the aim to provide support, establish alliances, and extending their network for a strong and broader impact of their resistance. The quotes speaking to this theme fall under two distinctions: interpersonal and collective expressions of alliance and solidarity. Interpersonal refers to support to other women on an individual and interpersonal level, while collective refers to their alliance and support with other groups and communities on the collective level.

### *Interpersonal Expression of Solidarity and Alliance*

Most activists were experiencing oppression in their personal lives, but it never stopped their engagement in activism and resistance for the injustices experienced by other women. Initially, they provided support to other women at the interpersonal level. For example,

Around the same time another incident occurred with me in my locality, in my C-block. I have mentioned about that girl Shanti from Rajasthan, who was thrown from the third floor. I was deeply hurt after looking at her case and I got totally immersed in her case and could not make it for the dates of my own case and thus my case was closed (Shahjehan Aapa).

Another activist shared her personal visits to coastal areas with the aim to educate, provide support, and help women of other communities experiencing injustices and oppression in different ways. She shared,

In the coastal areas here, there are a lot of Muslims. A collector asking me to do it gave me a lot of recognition and authority. If she goes and asks the Collector, things will get done, they felt. So once I took up the responsibility of visiting the coastal areas (D.Sharifa).

### *Collective Expression of Solidarity and Alliance*

Women activists also extended their support to other marginalized, and women led groups to create awareness regarding social issues and help them in taking their concerns to authorities. For example, one activist shared,

We . . . a lot of people involved in working with women in Delhi were beginning to feel the need to come together in some way. And (. . .) we got together with the help of one of the veterans of the women's movement in India called Vina Mazumdar (Urvashi Butalia).

Women activists expressed meeting other groups of young women engaged in helping marginalized communities or people affected by natural disasters and providing necessary hope and support to them for continuing their work. For example,

Particularly I have some experience and some information on the Gujarat riots, and I know that there are young women and even younger girls who have been taking part in the rescue operations, in relief operations, and they are looking at the problem not from the communal divide, but communal harmony. My own feeling is (. . .) And so, I personally think that we cannot afford to lose hope. We have to have hope in the goodness of the human beings, in the need that everybody will have to survive to get however the problems which are coming up.

Because human rights have been right now one area where all the groups are combining (Neera Desai).

It is often seen when disadvantaged group members experience threat to their group(s) identity and morality, they are likely to support and collaborate with other disadvantaged groups with similar grievances to influence and challenge authority and power structures particularly in repressive contexts. Some of the activists also served as a "negotiator" among conflicting parties and held communal harmony meetings to resolve issues. Activists continued their resistance despite facing extreme pushback for their everyday activism, such as threats from state in the form of kidnapping of family members, danger to their life, and anger from the community and elderly male members.

### *Empowering Other Women*

The collective expression of alliance and support was also manifested in empowering other women through building women centers, women-oriented organizations, awareness campaigns, skill programs, women training, and workshops.

Most of the women activists traveled around to give awareness and education to young girls and women. They also motivated women to engage in different political groups, thus uplifting and bringing women's issues to the forefront. One-woman activist shared,

Then I went around the rural areas (. . .) So, if the girls were told not to study, I would take the responsibility and get them admitted in a college. I would accompany them for interviews. So, the girls also began to grow. I was evolving myself and I also helped the girls grow. This was my entry point (Vina Mazumdar).

Moreover, some of the women activists also offered training programs for free particularly for marginalized and lower caste women to increase their awareness of social issues and provide them with the necessary tools and skills to fight against oppression and injustices. For example,

So, we had various programmes—training programmes, seminars and group discussions and training programmes to make women aware. Starting from seven to nine villages (. . .). But I would also like to emphasize that when we accepted the basic philosophy that action has to be the part of our consciousness raising and our understanding of women's status, action also means supporting other's action, and supporting and also participating in those activities which have been undertaken by other women's groups to change society (Neera Desai).

Women activists also started building networks or organizations with other women to empower, support, and encourage other women to take an active role in addressing and fighting women issues. For example,

So, the coming of the APWWS network in the district headquarters, women started intervening in cases, especially where a victim or an appellant was a woman, and there were lots of initial resistances by the system, especially the patriarchs of the councils (. . .). So, and in many other communities' women have started participating in councils, although unofficially but their presence is very much there (Jarjum Ete).

Moreover, women activists also expressed the importance of women education in psychological and physical liberation from oppressive forces by being actively involved as political educators

and educational activists. The findings of this theme also theoretically broaden and expand the traditional understanding of resistance by highlighting the multiple roles (e.g., negotiators, educators, and problem solvers) that women have taken in their everyday lives and their substantial impact on undermining the hegemonic hierarchies, ideologies, cultural norms, and social institutions threatening and limiting their agency, power, and autonomy. Moreover, by showing solidarity with other disadvantaged, these women activists have actively resisted against threats to their agency and morality as well as norms and ideologies preventing collaborations with other disadvantaged individuals and groups by constructing the counter hegemonic ideologies and redefining their social position as agents of social change. Thus, the findings of present study point to the complexities and breadth in the use of different forms of resistance in the everyday lives of disadvantaged.

### Discussion

The present study extended the traditional conceptualization of psychological resistance (Gramsci, 1971; Leach & Livingstone, 2015) by examining the relationship between psychological and everyday forms of resistance in the repressive context of the women movement in India. It is argued in this paper that psychological resistance is not only the determination of psychological meaning of material (economic) disadvantage but also the psychological meanings (such as but not limited to perceived threat to identity, morality, agency, cultural, social, community, and religious values) that disadvantaged derive from other aspects of their disadvantaged conditions such as social, emotional, and physical. These psychological meanings act as a positive force and encourage them to resist actively against disadvantaged conditions to assert and reclaim their agency, self-esteem, autonomy, identity and power. It means that disadvantaged members (e.g., women) do not always experience low self-esteem, stress, poor physical, and psychological well-being (Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 1999) as a result of their disadvantaged conditions. They actively resist their oppressive conditions psychologically as well as behaviorally. Thus, psychological and everyday resistance go hand in hand, which is also observed in the testimonies used in present research.

The present study further explored the multiple forms and layers of resistance in different spheres and that Indian women activists are engaged in beyond their activism/collective action. The psychological, as well as everyday resistance by Indian women activists, challenged the patriarchal discourses of heteronationalism, toxic masculinity, oppressive and exclusionary cultural norms, values, beliefs and state violence towards women and minorities. They asserted and reclaimed their agency, integrity, self-esteem, identity, morality, autonomy, and power by questioning, challenging, undermining, and rejecting power structures (e.g., patriarchy, prejudice, discrimination, sexism, casteism, classism, and heteronationalism) prevalent in Indian society at that time.

The paper focused on forms of resistance that are usually under-examined in social and political psychology literature, such as every day, psychological, cultural, and symbolic resistance (Blackwood et al., 2013; Leach & Livingstone, 2015; Rosales & Langhout, 2020). Reflexive thematic analysis was utilized and generated three themes speaking to the relationship between psychological and everyday forms of resistance that women activists were engaged in. The researcher actively interpreted the complexities and nuances

in data related to research questions and aims informed by the relevant theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, the particular context and intersecting identities (e.g., social class, education, and religion) of women activists helped understand, analyze, and interpret the nuances in the data.

In some themes, women activists resisted through their actions either individually or as part of a larger group (collectively) as solidarity and alliances with other disadvantaged groups, while some women activists used other creative forms of resistance such as cultural and symbolic resistance. It aligns with the conceptualization of everyday resistance, suggesting that it can be individual or collective, direct, or indirect, intentional, or unintentional, recognized, or unrecognized by targets, but have the clear potential of undermining power (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013; Scott, 1990; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). The resistance actions taken by women activists were against systems of oppression and domination affecting their private and public lives and occurred as part of their day-to-day lives. The findings of this research contribute to the existing knowledge on psychological resistance (Gramsci, 1971; Leach & Livingstone, 2015) and everyday resistance (Kelley, 1993; Scott, 1990; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013) by showing how these forms of resistance can play a role in undermining, questioning and challenging power structures.

The choice of resistance strategy was determined by their social class, religion, educational status, and particular circumstances. For example, a Muslim working class participant reported removing the veil and burqa (a cloth used to cover body) for fighting the dowry case of her daughter and later for engagement in other forms of resistance. In this instance, "removal of veil" was an intentional act of everyday resistance against hegemonic cultural ideologies limiting her body to the private sphere only. Psychologically, she experienced threat to her agency, identity, power, mobility, and autonomy and anger towards oppressive conditions which was then expressed in the form of psychological and behavioral resistance against oppression. Apparently, "the removal of veil" is a mundane everyday act of resistance; however, the consequences of it are broad that are rejecting hegemonic cultural and religious values and challenging patriarchal discourses and heteronationalism disproportionately harming and contributing to violence against women. Here, it is also important to consider that both psychological and behavioral (everyday) resistance is happening simultaneously. This woman activist behaviorally resisted immediately on getting awareness of her disadvantage and experiencing a threat to her agency, autonomy, power, and identity as a "woman." The traditional patriarchal culture and state policies in India limit women's autonomy and choices in taking major life decisions, e.g., restrictions on marriage of choice, restriction on mobility in the public sphere, political participation, barriers in education and financial independence, etc. The psychological and behavioral (everyday) resistance to such oppressive forces means freeing themselves from interpersonal violence and reclaiming their agency and autonomy in shaping their lives at the microlevel while defeating broader patriarchal, oppressive state systems, and power structures at the macrolevel for their liberation.

Furthermore, the findings suggest the relationship of psychological resistance with everyday resistance as responses under the theme of cultural/symbolic resistance and alliance and solidarity showed that most of the respondents in this context initially psychologically challenged the hierarchical structures and systems followed by

everyday acts of resistance. For example, the writing of the biography of “Jhansi ki Rani” and several other pieces provided psychological encouragement and courage to people for challenging the status quo and domination. Similarly, the street theatre presented alternatives to traditional caste and gender hierarchies thus pushing people to analyze these issues more critically and practically engage in resistance against hegemonic forces. In all these cases, women activists first rejected inequality and hierarchies cognitively that later informed and shaped their behavioral everyday resistance actions. Some studies on resistance in another contexts, for example, the Kurdish women struggle against patriarchy stemmed from psychological rejection and anger towards patriarchal oppression and domination, thus shaping or informing their behavioral resistance for their liberation against oppressive forces within and outside their communities (Açık, 2013; Gunes, 2013; Khodary et al., 2020). In other cases, the psychological as well as behavioral resistance exhibited by women activists, co-occurred, particularly under the theme of “breaking cultural norms.” The verbatims shared by women activists, for example, going to conference against the wishes of husband, removal of veil, confronting and beating the husband as a response against physical domestic abuse, intercaste marriage and throwing pebbles on people for taking away little girl for forced marriage have all shown the simultaneous occurrence of psychological as well as behavioral resistance and they were very spontaneous responses to their experiences of oppression. It further shows that these resistance actions happened with no specific, clear intention and women did what they thought was best-suited at those particular circumstances. These findings are aligned with some of the past work on everyday resistance, suggesting that everyday resistance is a practice, neither a certain consciousness, intent, recognition, nor an outcome. It is done routinely in everyday lives and is not politically articulated or formally organized in that situation with some concrete outcome (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013).

Some women respondents reported using creative forms of art such as street theatre, plays and writing to resist patriarchal and state oppression, oppressive policies, and laws. Writing, arts, and theatre resist in subtle (indirect and nonconfrontational) psychological ways, but they are powerful forms of “everyday resistance” (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Fewer studies in social and political psychology addressed the use of several forms of art in resisting oppression and social injustices in different contexts (Farzana, 2011; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). For example, one study used visual culture to promote creative resistance among students for their struggle against cultural and ideological injustice (Darts, 2004). In another study, several art forms such as paintings, plays, humor, monologues, and poems were used to resist oppression in different cultural contexts (Williamson, 2010). The current findings help extend the literature on every day and psychological resistance as well as resistance based on culture and context by showing the importance of the psychological resistance within cultural and symbolic resistance playing an essential role in changing beliefs and attitudes of individuals towards minority groups and disadvantaged members as manifested in the verbatims covered under the cultural/symbolic resistance theme. It also suggests that individuals are using multiple forms of resistance simultaneously in some circumstances which makes the resistance complex and cannot be exactly categorized under established categories of resistance. These confusion and complexity in categorizing forms of resistance

have also been discussed in past work on everyday resistance (see review by Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013).

Furthermore, findings also revealed the role of education in determining the everyday form of resistance used by these women activists. Women activists who were educated engaged more in creative forms of resistance relative to those who were less educated. Families of some women activists were already involved in politics that helped strengthen their knowledge and critical understanding of social issues and provided necessary confidence and motivation for continuing their activism. The support and acceptance from their communities and family gave them necessary push to continue their activism. Women activists expressed a significant change in their thinking patterns, beliefs, values, and ways of living due to their activism. Some studies in political psychology literature suggest activists’ growth in terms of increased empathy, learning, awareness, and critical understanding of social issues during and after resistance (Harrison & Mather, 2017).

Another interesting finding revealed from these testimonies was less probability of reporting their small, subtle, nonconfrontational acts of resistance. In reality, they were probably doing more resistance in their everyday lives than what they actually reported as usually mundane and everyday acts of resistance are ignored. One of the main reasons is because such ordinary acts are normalized. Therefore, the agents of resistance themselves are not necessarily labeling it as “resistance” at all, instead of regular part of their life, culture, personality, tradition, and way of living. Another possible reason might be related to valuing collective action (i.e., protests, demonstrations) more than other less prototypical (e.g., every day, psychological, cultural/symbolic) forms of resistance (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Rosales & Langhout, 2020) in mainstream frameworks in social, political and resistance literature as well as dominant cultural discourses. These frameworks and discourses eventually influence and shape the people’s perspectives about resistance, thus ignoring the small, nonconfrontational, psychological, and everyday acts of resistance. Despite this, the data revealed fascinating findings about everyday and psychological resistance and the relationship among them in understudied and non-WEIRD contexts, i.e., women movement in India.

Overall, it is observed that in tight and repressive contexts, in face of state sanctions and increased perception of risk associated with resistance (Ayanian & Tausch, 2016; Ayanian et al., 2021; Opp & Roehl, 1990), the disadvantaged group members resist using indirect and nonconfrontational forms of resistance, such as psychological and everyday resistance. The current findings have shown that psychological resistance occurs first followed by everyday resistance in some cases, but in other scenarios, both co-occur. It means the “way of doing” resistance depends on the situation, time, and availability of resources at that moment. Findings have further demonstrated that both psychological and everyday resistance can occur with or without any apparent intention and can happen as a result of some triggering event. Furthermore, the everyday acts of resistance do not need to produce specific outcomes instead, the *potential* of undermining the power and the way of doing or “act” itself holds much importance. The findings broaden and extend the existing literature on everyday (Rosales & Langhout, 2020; Scott, 1990; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013) as well as psychological resistance (Gramsci, 1971; Leach & Livingstone, 2015) by providing context-based examples of these forms of resistance and highlighting the relationship between psychological and everyday

resistance. The findings also challenge the typical notion in mainstream psychology (see Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 1999) suggesting psychological, moral, social, and cultural damage to disadvantaged members as consequence of their disadvantaged conditions and present them as “passive victims” unable to control and shape their lives. Our findings suggest that disadvantaged group members do not internalize their oppression and disadvantaged conditions and actively resist it and change their social conditions.

Moreover, the findings from this research make an important claim about the issues of recognition and intention in psychological and everyday resistance. The researcher suggests that discourse and context matter and it is through power discourses situated contexts that resistance and power are framed, understood, and analyzed. Through such framing actors understand themselves and their social positions and identities which means that consciousness or intention will vary widely. The researcher also wants to emphasize that research on resistance must be about discourse and not mainly about the discourse of resisters. Resistance brings it with the risk of marginalizing, excluding, and silencing the multiple articulations of resistance especially when only specific intentions are considered as “legitimate.” The intentions, emotions, feelings, needs, and desires linked with nonpolitical goals are usually ignored and devalued irrespective of their potential to undermine power. Hence, I propose based on findings of my current work that it is an urgent need in the field of resistance studies to let go of this problematic tendency of privileging certain consciousness, intentions, direct and confrontational forms of resistance while ignoring, silencing, and erasing all other forms of resistance with or without clear intentions. In general, findings contribute to limited literature on everyday and psychological resistance and highlight the nuances in the relationship between psychological and everyday resistance by incorporating India’s rare and underexamined context.

### Methodological Strengths and Limitations

There are several methodological strengths of this study. First, we examined an understudied issue in an understudied and underrepresented context. Specifically, we extend the literature on everyday resistance and psychological resistance beyond the WEIRD contexts (Henrich et al., 2010) and examine the research question among understudied context and disadvantaged groups (i.e., women activists) in India. This context is also underexamined in feminist (Crenshaw, 1990; Severs et al., 2016) violence and oppression literature (Pitts, 1998; Tuck, 2009; Weitz, 2001). A central strength of this paper is that it centers the people on margins, underrepresented members of the disadvantaged group (i.e., women activists from India) from the Global South. Therefore, the knowledge in this work is produced by centering the under-represented group from one of the countries in the Global South (i.e., India) and active interpretation of the data by the Global South researcher. Furthermore, findings extend research on less prototypical forms of resistance (e.g., everyday, psychological, and cultural/symbolic) and their relationship with psychological resistance that is usually understudied in mainstream social and political psychology literature.

Other methodological strengths of this study include the use of qualitative methodology. Most of the research studies addressing collective action models utilized quantitative methodology

(van Zomeren et al., 2004, 2012). However, there are some works within collective action literature following qualitative methodology (Cornejo et al., 2021; see Drury et al., 2020), but they are very few and limited. Given that the existing studies on resistance literature have rarely focused on everyday and its relationship with psychological resistance (Haslam & Reicher, 2012; Leach & Livingstone, 2015; Tuck, 2009) particularly in context of India, so the qualitative approach allowed researcher to see the variety of ways in which women activists engaged in resistance beyond collective activism. Moreover, qualitative methods helped us reach vulnerable and understudied communities (Liamputtong, 2007), interpret and understand the complexities and nuances in the data.

There are some limitations of this study as well. For example, women in this sample were activists, so from this data, it is unclear what resistance looks like in women who are nonactivists, so this study does not reflect on their actions. However, findings from 12 interviews provide a good idea about the forms of resistance that Indian women activists were engaged in at that time and the relationship between psychological and everyday resistance as the testimonies were very rich and full of information. Another limitation was that these interviews provided no idea about the caste of women activists, and we know that the caste problem is highly prevalent in India. The analysis might have shown more nuances and differences in resistance practices if the caste of these activists were revealed. There is a possible chance of subjectivity and bias in this work as the researcher actively interpreted the data; thus, researcher acknowledges her theoretical positions, values and subjectivity in the interpretation of data and considers it as a resource for research, of meaning and knowledge as partial, situated, and contextual (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

### Implications

This research is particularly beneficial in expanding the conceptualization of psychological resistance (Gramsci, 1971; Leach & Livingstone, 2015) and everyday resistance by highlighting the relationship between these forms of resistance in the understudied context of women’s movement in India. The findings contributed to the existing literature on every day and psychological resistance and to national and global political discourses where the role and contributions of women for liberation struggle are usually neglected in broader Indian political discourse and international feminist, violence, and resistance literature. Moreover, this work gave a new lens to the women struggle in India by focusing on the agency and resistance of women activists, as usually in past literature, women in third world countries are presented as “victims” and lack agency to resist oppression (Abraham, 2000; Gallin, 1994; Maguigan, 1995). Furthermore, it also highlighted the importance of recognizing less prototypical forms of resistance such as every day, psychological, cultural/symbolic resistance, and the role of the context in determining the use and types of resistance. The findings of this work can help examine struggles of women against power structures in other similar contexts such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and broadly South Asia.

In the future, it is suggested that more studies in other repressive contexts need to be conducted to strengthen the claim of relationship between psychological and everyday forms of resistance. It is further suggested that future studies must also examine why are certain “intentions” in cases of resistance are privileged and the

harm it has been causing to the subalterns or the individuals located in the margins of societies. Hence, there is a pressing need of critical scholarship on resistance to unpack unrecognized assumptions, power relations, unique contexts, nonpolitical intentions, and possibilities of social change associated with less prototypical forms of resistance.

### Conclusion

This paper integrated research on everyday and psychological resistance revealing multiple ways women activists in India engaged in resistance beyond collective activism and the relationship between psychological and everyday resistance. Thereby, it adds and extends nuances in everyday and psychological resistance literatures. The study's important theoretical and practical implications are that it extends resistance literature particularly in understudied and non-WEIRD context, e.g., India. Findings also suggest the need for critical scholarship on resistance in the social and political psychology re-evaluating the dominant frameworks of resistance that ignore, erase, and silence the multiple less prototypical forms of resistance. Findings also suggest addressing and unpacking the invisible assumptions, nonconventional intentions, actors, and social change potentials linked with different forms of resistance. To conclude, the women's movement in India is one of the most significant efforts in reclaiming their citizenship claims to participate as equals in the political and development process. The psychological and everyday resistance by Indian women activists was a response to the widespread patriarchal, communal, and state violence towards women and minorities.

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