

increasing pressure from European powers and nationalist movements gained momentum within its territories, the Kurds began developing a sense of ethnic identity and self-awareness. Intellectuals and Kurdish elites began advocating for Kurdish rights and cultural recognition, setting the foundation for a national consciousness. Nonetheless, Kurdish nationalism remained secondary to tribal and local allegiances, and it was only later, amid the political upheaval surrounding World War I, that Kurdish nationalism would crystallise as a coherent political force.

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the Allied powers proposed new boundaries and state formations in the Middle East. The Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 was the first document to formally recognise the possibility of a Kurdish state. Article 64 of the treaty included provisions for a potential independent Kurdish nation in parts of the former Ottoman Kurdistan. For many Kurds, this moment symbolised the long-awaited possibility of autonomy and recognition within an international framework.

However, the Treaty of Sèvres was never implemented. The geopolitical dynamics of the region and the rise of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who led the Turkish War of Independence, quickly rendered the treaty obsolete. Turkish forces rejected foreign intervention and asserted control over what they deemed Turkish territory, including the Kurdish regions. The subsequent Treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923, formalised the boundaries of the modern Turkish Republic and entirely disregarded Kurdish claims. This diplomatic reversal led to profound disillusionment among the Kurds and sowed the seeds of a prolonged struggle for autonomy and recognition.

Under the leadership of Atatürk, the newly established Turkish Republic pursued a policy of creating a homogeneous national identity based on Turkish ethnicity and language. This policy, known as *Turkification*, aimed to eliminate ethnic and linguistic differences within the population to foster a cohesive Turkish identity. Kurdish language, culture, and customs were suppressed, with the Kurdish identity either outright denied or reclassified as 'Mountain Turks' to obscure any ethnic distinction. The Kurdish population resisted these assimilationist policies, leading to several uprisings, including the significant Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925. Sheikh Said, a religious and tribal leader, mobilised Kurdish forces against the Turkish state, demanding recognition of

Kurdish identity and Islamic governance. The rebellion was quickly quashed by the Turkish military, and the aftermath saw an increase in repression against the Kurds. Kurdish leaders were executed, Kurdish villages were destroyed, and laws were enacted to restrict the Kurdish language and cultural practices. This period marked a turning point, as it intensified Kurdish nationalism and reinforced the perception of the Turkish state as an oppressive force.

Beyond Turkey, Kurds in Iraq, Iran, and Syria faced similar struggles. In Iraq, British mandate authorities initially promised Kurdish autonomy, but these assurances were never fulfilled. Kurdish regions in northern Iraq remained marginalised, and subsequent Iraqi governments, particularly under Saddam Hussein, adopted policies of forced relocation and Arabisation to weaken Kurdish political influence. The Anfal campaign in the 1980s epitomised this repression, with the Iraqi regime committing atrocities against the Kurdish population, including the use of chemical weapons in Halabja. In Iran, the Kurdish movement encountered both cultural suppression and military opposition. The Kurds of Iranian Kurdistan sought autonomy within a federal system, but the Pahlavi dynasty and later the Islamic Republic consistently denied these aspirations. Briefly, in 1946, Kurds established the Republic of Mahabad with Soviet backing, but the fledgling state was short-lived, falling within a year due to Iranian and international pressure. In Syria, the Ba'athist regime marginalised the Kurdish population through policies such as the denial of citizenship to thousands of Kurds, rendering them stateless. Kurdish political activism was consistently repressed, though Kurdish identity remained resilient, resurfacing in the context of the Syrian Civil War, where Kurdish groups established autonomous regions in northeastern Syria.

The Kurdish nationalist movement today is deeply influenced by these historical legacies of repression and fractured identity. In Turkey, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), founded in 1978, initiated an armed struggle for Kurdish autonomy. Although the PKK has evolved over time and now advocates for democratic autonomy rather than outright independence, the Turkish state continues to view it as a major security threat, resulting in ongoing conflict. Meanwhile, in Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) emerged as a semi-autonomous entity in the aftermath of the Gulf War and gained further autonomy following the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. In 2017, the KRG

held an independence referendum, which passed with overwhelming support among Kurds but was met with opposition from the Iraqi government and neighboring states, underscoring the persistent international opposition to Kurdish statehood. In Syria, the Syrian Civil War provided a unique opportunity for Kurdish groups to assert autonomy through the formation of Rojava, a self-administered Kurdish region based on principles of direct democracy and gender equality. However, the future of Rojava remains uncertain due to regional power dynamics and international interests.

Methodology: Postcolonial Theory and Resistance Literature

Postcolonial theory, as developed by scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, provides a crucial lens through which to analyse the intersection of colonial legacies, identity, and resistance within marginalised communities. Said's concept of "Orientalism" (1978) offers a foundational critique of how Western discourses have constructed the 'East' as an exoticised and inferior 'Other,' serving as a tool of domination that justified colonial interventions. This theoretical framework becomes relevant when examining the Kurdish experience, where Kurds have been marginalised not only within Middle Eastern nation-states but also in Western narratives that often reduce them to an oppressed minority. These portrayals frequently fail to capture the full depth of Kurdish identity, resistance, and cultural richness, instead reinforcing stereotypes that frame them either as threats to state unity or as passive victims in need of rescue.

Spivak's influential work on representation, particularly her critique of who speaks for the marginalised, adds another dimension to the Kurdish struggle. In her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Spivak underscores the need to interrogate how narratives are constructed about marginalised groups and who is afforded the authority to articulate these narratives. The Kurdish experience of systematic exclusion and erasure by hegemonic states across Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria mirrors Spivak's concept of the 'subaltern'—those who are denied a voice within dominant sociopolitical frameworks. This concept is especially pertinent to Haritha Savitri's *Zin*, which centers on characters who actively resist state-sanctioned oppression. The novel highlights voices that are otherwise marginalised within Kurdish society

itself, such as those of women who confront patriarchal norms and state violence. This focus aligns with Spivak's insistence on listening to subaltern voices as they articulate their own experiences, rather than having their stories mediated or spoken for by outsiders.

Bhabha's theory of 'hybridity' and 'Third Space,' further enriches the understanding of Kurdish identity and resistance. In his analysis, hybridity challenges the binary opposition between coloniser and colonised by suggesting that colonial encounters create new, hybrid identities that defy simplistic classifications. Kurdish identity is similarly complex and multifaceted, shaped not only by the influence of the dominant states that have sought to assimilate or suppress them but also by internal dynamics that reflect a blending of traditional values with modern political ideologies. The emergence of Kurdish political parties, cultural expressions, and literature serves as an assertion of a distinct Kurdish identity that resists easy categorisation. This hybridity can be seen in Kurdish art, literature, and activism, which often incorporate elements of both traditional Kurdish customs and contemporary social and political themes, creating a unique cultural narrative that challenges monolithic views of nationalism and identity.

Within this framework, *Zin* functions as a work of resistance literature, depicting how Kurdish individuals and communities navigate the complexities of identity under oppressive regimes. Savitri's portrayal of characters such as Seetha—a woman embodying resilience, defiance, and agency in the face of systemic violence—illustrates Spivak's notion of “speaking with” rather than “speaking for” the subaltern. Seetha's character is not merely a passive victim of the oppressive forces surrounding her; she actively challenges these forces, reclaiming her voice and asserting her identity within a patriarchal and politically hostile environment. Her narrative not only personifies Kurdish women's struggles against patriarchal norms but also symbolises a broader collective fight for cultural preservation and recognition within a hostile political landscape. This aligns with Spivak's view that subaltern voices must be both heard and respected, with attention given to the structures of power that have historically suppressed them.

The relevance of postcolonial theory in this context extends beyond literary analysis to contribute to a broader understanding of how colonial legacies

inform contemporary Kurdish struggles. Said's insights into Orientalism reveal how the portrayal of Kurdish identity in regional and international discourses often reinforces stereotypes and marginalisation, while Spivak's concept of the subaltern underscores the importance of Kurdish voices being represented on their own terms. Bhabha's theory of hybridity helps scholars recognise the fluid and evolving nature of Kurdish identity as it interacts with modern political movements and cultural expressions, creating a dynamic and resistant form of self-representation. This framework illuminates how Kurdish resistance literature, as exemplified in *Zin*, serves as a counter-narrative that challenges dominant representations, amplifies marginalised voices, and reclaims Kurdish identity and agency in the face of ongoing oppression. *Zin*, thus, becomes not only a narrative of Kurdish resilience but also a critical commentary on how colonial histories and present-day state policies continue to shape the Kurdish quest for autonomy and recognition. Rather than reiterating theoretical definitions, the subsequent analysis applies these frameworks directly to the narrative strategies, characterisation, and thematic concerns of *Zin*.

Conflict, Displacement, and Cultural Identity

Zin unfolds in a world torn apart by conflict, where the Kurdish people struggle to maintain their cultural identity against the backdrop of systemic violence. The novel moves between Istanbul and the devastated Kurdish regions, especially Amed (Diyarbakır). The narrative follows Seetha, an Indian student from the University of Barcelona, who travels to Diyarbakir while pregnant with her love child. Her personal journey to find her Kurdish lover, Dewran, quickly descends into a nightmare of state violence when she is apprehended by the Turkish secret police. The novel offers an unflinching look at the 'genocidal state machinery' as Seetha is subjected to brutal torture and gang-rape, strategically 'staked as bait' to lure Dewran and his siblings, who have been branded as terrorists by the regime.

The novel's portrayal of displacement is reminiscent of what Said describes as the "exilic condition" where the sense of belonging is disrupted, and identity becomes a site of contestation (Said 2001). The Kurdish people, spread across Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Armenia, are depicted as living in a state of perpetual exile, their existence marked by the constant threat of

erasure. The novel's setting, which alternates between the cosmopolitan city of Istanbul and the desolate Kurdish regions, serves as a metaphor for the fractured identity of the Kurdish people. This duality is further complicated by the protagonist's journey into the depths of Kurdish suffering, revealing the deep-seated cultural and emotional scars that define the Kurdish experience. Seetha's fight for liberty becomes incidental, trapped within the 'diplomatic haggling' between two nations where humanitarian concerns are sidelined for commercial and political interests. Through this lens, Savithri depicts a state that 'breaks all bounds to mercilessly exterminate' its Kurdish minority, forcing the protagonist into a transnational struggle for survival.

Female Agency and the Subaltern Voice

The representation of female agency in *Zin* is one of the novel's most significant contributions to the discourse on Kurdish resistance. Seetha, embodies the resilience and defiance of Kurdish women, challenging the patriarchal structures within both Kurdish society and the oppressive state apparatus. Her wrongful detention by Turkish authorities and her refusal to be silenced is a powerful act of resistance exemplifying what Spivak conceptualises as the subaltern's struggle to speak within hegemonic power structures. While state mechanisms attempt to silence her through incarceration and violence, Seetha's body and voice become sites of resistance, transforming personal suffering into political testimony. Rather than portraying her as a passive victim, *Zin* presents her as an ethical witness whose endurance mobilises transnational solidarity across borders. Her search for Dewran is initially a personal quest of love. However, as she witnesses the systematic 'Turkification'—where speaking Kurdish invites suspicion and loving a Kurd makes one an enemy—her identity shifts from an observer to an active participant in resistance. Her experience mirrors the collective trauma of Kurdish civilians subjected to state violence, thereby linking individual pain to a broader history of repression. In doing so, the novel affirms that subaltern resistance need not always be articulated through armed struggle but may also emerge through survival, empathy, and refusal to be erased.

Mojab (2001) argues that Kurdish women's participation in the resistance movement disrupts traditional gender roles and redefines the concept of nationhood. *Zin* reflects this disruption, portraying women as active participants

in the struggle for a free Kurdistan. The novel challenges the stereotypical depiction of women in conflict zones as passive victims, presenting them instead as empowered agents who fight not only for their people's freedom but also for their own rights and dignity. The brutal torture Seetha endures in Turkish custody is not portrayed simply as an act of victimisation but as a catalyst for collective mobilisation—one that compels students, journalists, and activists from Turkey, Barcelona, and India to unite in her defense. This cross-border solidarity underscores the ways in which women's bodies, voices, and experiences can incite political consciousness and action. Savithri also portrays the everyday resistance of Kurdish women who live under constant threat, highlighting how acts of care, storytelling, and survival are themselves political. In this way, *Zin* redefines the contours of nationhood by placing women at the center of the narrative, not as adjuncts to male revolutionaries but as agents whose struggles for bodily autonomy and voice are inseparable from the larger quest for Kurdish self-determination.

Resistance and the Dream of a Free Kurdistan

The recurring dream of a free Kurdistan, uniting all Kurdish-majority regions into a sovereign nation, is central to *Zin*. This dream is a symbol of hope and resilience, much like what Bhabha describes as the "Third Space," where cultural negotiation takes place, allowing for the emergence of new forms of identity and resistance (Bhabha 1994). The novel portrays this dream as not merely a political aspiration but as a manifestation of the collective desire for self-determination and cultural survival. Seetha's story, in particular, operates within this hybrid space—an Indian woman whose personal journey becomes entangled with the Kurdish struggle, making her both an outsider and a participant. Her transformation throughout the novel reflects how cultural and political identities are not inherited or static, but forged through conflict, empathy, and shared purpose. However, as Natali notes, the Kurdish struggle is complicated by the geopolitical realities of the region, where international powers often use the Kurds as pawns in their strategic games. *Zin* addresses this complexity, depicting the betrayal of the Kurds by powerful allies like the United States, which uses them in the fight against ISIS only to abandon them to Turkish aggression. This portrayal of geopolitical manipulation highlights the

precariousness of the Kurdish situation and the immense challenges they face in realising their dream of a free Kurdistan.

Zin ultimately demonstrates how literature can function as an ethical archive of resistance, preserving silenced histories while forging transnational solidarities. By narrativising the Kurdish struggle through female agency, trauma, and intimate acts of resilience, Haritha Savitri transforms a distant geopolitical conflict into a deeply human narrative. The novel challenges state-sponsored erasure while affirming storytelling as a vital mode of cultural survival and political witness. Situated within global resistance literature, *Zin* not only amplifies marginalised voices but also invites readers to recognise the shared human stakes of displacement, dignity, and freedom.

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Embodied Resistance: Corporeality and Agency in Poetics of Kutti Revathi and Sukirtharani

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Abstract

This essay critically compares and analyses Kutti Revathi's *Body's Door* and Sukirtharani's *My Body*, two Dalit feminist poems that engage with the theme of corporeality. Through an exploration of the body as a site of both oppression and empowerment, the article examines how these poets use the materiality of the body to assert agency, resistance, and self-reclamation. The analysis highlights how both poems reject the historical objectification and marginalization of the Dalit female body, positioning it instead as a space for radical self-affirmation. By employing metaphors such as the door in Revathi's poem and the sensuality of the body in Sukirtharani's poem, both poets challenge patriarchal and casteist norms, reclaiming their bodies not as passive sites of violence but as active agents of change. The article further incorporates the theoretical frameworks of Judith Butler's 'performativity,' bell hooks' 'self-love' and 'resistance,' and Anjali Arondekar's application of 'intersectionality' to caste, sexuality, gender, and colonialism, to deepen the understanding of these poets' embodied expressions of political resistance. The essay concludes that the theme of corporeality in both works is not only a critique of the historical violence done to Dalit women's bodies but also an assertion of their autonomy, sexuality, and embodied power in the face of oppressive systems.

Keywords: Corporeality; Feminism; Empowerment; Political Resistance; Oppression

Introduction

Tamil feminist poetics encompasses a rich literary tradition which explores the experiences, perspectives, and voices of Tamil women. This genre often critiques, and challenges the dominant patriarchal norms, societal expectations, and it questions the social, cultural, and economic structure that perpetuates gender-based discrimination. Tamil feminist poetics provide clear insights into

the lives of Tamil women, focusing on their pain, obstacles, and power to survive. Tamil feminist poetics provide a platform for women to voice out and promote a sense of agency and solidarity. Poets delve into themes such as identity, body autonomy, love, and resistance. Poets have contributed to the Tamil literary landscapes, pushing boundaries and challenging societal norms through their poems. The history of Tamil feminist poetry is rich and complex spanning centuries. Starting from Olavai, Adhimanthi, Velliveedi, Avvaiyyar, Karaikkal Ammaiyar to present sensational poets like Meena Kandasamy, Malathy Maithri, Ku Uma Devi, Sukirtharani, Kutti Revathi, Salma, poets have stood for the right space for women folk.

The essay discusses the works of two famous poets, Sukirtharani, and Kutti Revathi. They have made a remarkable contribution to Tamil literature. Kutti Revathi and Sukirtharani emerge as revolutionary voices articulating the body as a landscape of resistance. For poets like Kutti Revathi and Sukirtharani, the body is not just an image — it's a battleground. In the context of Tamil literature, especially where women's voices have often been controlled or erased by dominant narratives, both poets use their work to reclaim the body as a site of power, resistance, and memory. Revathi and Sukirtharani do not write about the body in safe or sanitized ways. Instead, they show it as alive, unpredictable, and deeply tied to both nature and history. This essay explores how Tamil feminist poets Kutti Revathi and Sukirtharani represent the body in their poetry — not just as a physical form, but as a space of memory, power, and resistance. Both poets reclaim the female body from a tradition that has rendered it either invisible or violable. In doing so, they construct a poetics that is both corporeal and insurgent, transforming private affect into public dissent.

Existing scholarship on Tamil feminist poetics has largely focused on the controversies surrounding the body and the public backlash against women who write about desire and sexuality. Scholars such as S. Anandhi, and Mini Krishnan have explored how Tamil women's writing confronts the patriarchal control of language and space. Similarly, Meena Kandasamy has highlighted the role of caste and sexuality in shaping contemporary Dalit women's writing. In the context of Sukirtharani, Dalit literary scholars like Gopal Guru, and Y. S. Alone have framed her poetics within a broader discourse of Dalit aesthetics,