

WOMEN'S RESISTANCE TO EDUCATIONAL INJUSTICE IN MODERN INDONESIAN LITERARY TEXTS

***(Resistensi Perempuan terhadap Ketidakadilan Pendidikan dalam Teks Sastra
Indonesia Modern)***

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Abstract: *This study discusses the representation of women's resistance against educational injustice in modern Indonesian literary texts. The main focus is on how female characters in literary works struggle to gain the right to education amid patriarchal cultural pressures, structural poverty, and oppressive power. Using a feminist approach and narrative analysis, this research examines several modern Indonesian literary works that portray women as agents of resistance—through symbolic struggles, concrete actions, and steadfastness in defending the right to learn. The findings show that women's resistance to educational injustice in literary texts is not merely a form of passive resistance, but an active strategy in building self-awareness, empowering communities, and rejecting domination that restricts access to knowledge. This study reveals that literature not only records gender inequality in education, but also serves as an important space for articulating resistance and expressing hope for social change.*

Keywords: *Campus Novels; Culture; Education; Political Literature; Qualitative Research; Social Values*

A. INTRODUCTION

Education has always been a crucial foundation for the development of individuals and society, while also serving as an arena for the contestation of values, identity, and access. For women, education functions as more than a means of knowledge—it is also a symbol of struggle against patriarchal norms that restrict their freedom and rights. In modern Indonesia, the discourse on women's education is often interwoven with narratives of social and cultural struggle—where efforts to break the chains of systems that constrain women become a central theme. Since the late nineteenth century, the figure of Raden Adjeng Kartini has become an icon of this struggle. Through her letters, Kartini expressed her longing for intellectual freedom and equal opportunities in education—a desire that later became a symbol of women's resistance against binding social structures (Kartini, 1900s).

The study of modern Indonesian literature offers a rich reflective space to examine representations of women's resistance to various forms of injustice, including those related to education. Contemporary novels often depict female characters who actively resist social structures, voicing their inner turbulence in confronting patriarchy through language and action. This theme appears both in the narratives of women authors and in those of male writers who position women at the center of social critique. An important

example is *Kenanga* by Oka Rusmini. Through the characters Kenanga, Luh Intan, and Kemuning, Rusmini shows the identity conflicts faced by Balinese women within the caste system and tradition. Luh Intan, a woman of the sudra caste, is portrayed as struggling hard and succeeding in entering university through the national selection exam despite many social obstacles. Meanwhile, Kemuning, who experiences social pressure and unrequited love, fails to realize her educational dreams—an authentic portrayal of how social systems channel educational injustice based on gender and caste (Minarni, 2018).

In addition, in the novel *9 Matahari*, the main female character not only struggles to obtain a decent education, but also passes on the effort to build a more dignified life for other women. Education is depicted as a path toward equality and autonomy—a medium for shifting the patriarchal power relations that have long governed women’s lives (Guntar et al., 2023). Meanwhile, *Minoel* by Ken Terate presents women’s internal and external conflicts when confronted with social burdens, stereotypes, and marginalization, and how they respond with various forms of resistance—both verbal and symbolic—against gender relegation in social life (Mawarni et al., 2022). Furthermore, the sastra wangi movement pioneered by Ayu Utami through her novel *Saman* (1998) opened a new chapter in the discourse on gender and education in Indonesian literature. Stories of women who dare to speak about sexuality and freedom, while condemning restrictive social structures, reinforce education as an effort toward personal and social liberation (Utami, 1998). These narratives position education as a starting point for women’s empowerment through language and critique of the patriarchal order. Poets such as Toeti Heraty, through works like *Calon Arang*, also present women’s resistance in poetic form—transforming mythological figures into a discourse on gender subversion (Heraty, 1980s). Meanwhile, Ratna Indraswari, an activist for disabled women, through poetry and oral narratives, tells of the struggles of women who experience social marginalization—including in access to education and social autonomy (Indraswari, 1970s–2000s).

Although the development of this field is significant, comprehensive studies that specifically address the theme of “*women’s resistance to educational injustice*” in modern Indonesian literary texts remain relatively limited. Many studies focus on the representation of gender stereotypes or identity conflicts, without highlighting in detail education as a field of narrative and symbolic struggle. Yet education is not only a right and a necessity, but also a critical narrative mobilized by female characters to challenge social structures. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how modern Indonesian novels map women’s educational injustice and how their characters enact resistance. The main research questions are: How is educational injustice experienced and depicted by female characters in modern Indonesian literary texts? What forms of resistance are employed by female characters in facing educational injustice? How is this discourse of resistance constructed through narrative structure, characterization, and the symbolism of education in the texts? To what extent do these representations of resistance to educational injustice enrich the discourse on gender and education in the context of contemporary Indonesian society? To answer these questions, this article uses an interdisciplinary approach—

feminist literary criticism, discourse analysis, and critical education studies. This selection enables a holistic analysis of textual aspects, narrative structures, and the socio-cultural contexts that underlie the stories. The data are processed qualitatively, involving textual quotations, narrative dialogues, educational symbolism, and analysis of characters and relevant motives.

This research is designed to address how women in modern Indonesian literary texts struggle for their right to education amid unjust and patriarchal social structures. Focusing on women's resistance to educational injustice requires an approach that not only understands the narrative structure of the texts, but also the ideological and social frameworks underlying those narratives. To this end, the study adopts an interdisciplinary approach combining feminist literary criticism, critical discourse analysis, and critical education theory. Feminist literary criticism serves as the main foundation for analyzing how representations of women are constructed in texts. This approach centers on female characters' experiences, how they are positioned within power relations in society, and how narratives about them are shaped and articulated by authors. Within this framework, women are no longer positioned merely as passive objects, but as active and empowered subjects resisting oppressive systems.

Feminist criticism enables a political and ideological reading of texts by questioning gender constructions that are deeply rooted in culture and in literary language itself. However, such a reading would be incomplete without understanding how language as a narrative medium constructs power. For this reason, critical discourse analysis becomes important in reading literature as a discursive field saturated with power relations. Through this approach, it can be revealed how sentence structure, word choice, metaphor, and narrative patterns in the text either reinforce or challenge patriarchal ideology. The discourse of education in the texts appears not only explicitly in dialogues or narration, but also implicitly through symbolism, characterization, and the conflicts experienced by female characters. Critical discourse analysis provides tools to trace the subtle ways in which domination and resistance are formed and conveyed through language. Meanwhile, critical education theory, rooted in the ideas of Paulo Freire, provides a framework that understands education as a political space that is not neutral. According to Freire, education can be an instrument of liberation, but it can also become an instrument for reproducing injustice if carried out within an oppressive framework. Using this theory, the study views education in literary texts not merely as background, but as a symbol of women's struggle to achieve self-determination and to transform their social conditions. Education becomes a representation of access to power, intellectual space, and identity that have long been taken away by the patriarchal system. These three approaches are chosen because they complement one another: feminist criticism explains how women are represented in literature; critical discourse analysis unpacks how language creates and consolidates social structures; and critical education theory provides a framework for seeing education as a field of ideological conflict. Combining the three allows the study

to address the problem comprehensively in terms of content, form, and social context of the literary texts examined.

The importance of this research lies in the fact that education remains a pressing issue in the lives of Indonesian women, especially those in marginalized social, economic, and cultural conditions. Literature, as a cultural mirror, records various forms of women's struggle against a discriminatory education system. However, few studies have specifically discussed how resistance to educational injustice is portrayed in modern Indonesian literary texts. Yet these texts often contain small but important narratives about how women build self-awareness, resist oppression, and create alternative spaces to pursue education. Thus, this research fills a gap in Indonesian feminist literary studies and expands our understanding of how literary texts can contribute to the discourse on social justice. Furthermore, the significance of this study lies in its relevance to contemporary social realities. Although women's access to education in Indonesia has statistically increased, structural issues such as poverty, cultural discrimination, and gendered burdens remain major obstacles. This study provides an overview of how these issues are reflected and critiqued through literary works, and how these narratives can serve as critical reflections for society at large, particularly in building an education system that is more just and gender-equitable.

This study's benefits span three main areas. First, theoretically, it enriches the corpus of feminist literary criticism by foregrounding education as a central issue in women's struggles. It also strengthens the integration of interdisciplinary approaches in literary studies, which is increasingly needed to understand the complexity of texts and their contexts. Second, practically, the findings can be used by educators, writers, and gender activists to design learning materials or campaigns that are more sensitive to issues of educational injustice. By understanding how women's resistance in literary texts is constructed, they can highlight inspiring stories with the power to change societal perspectives. Third, socio-culturally, the research encourages greater appreciation of the role of literature in advancing social justice and gender equality. The literary texts examined demonstrate that women's struggles take place not only in the real world but also in the imaginative realm, where language and storytelling become primary weapons against oppression. Thus, the research is not only academically relevant but also strategically valuable in efforts to realize a more just and civilized society. In this context, literature becomes a tool for understanding and transforming the world—especially a world that has often placed women in marginalized positions. Therefore, studying women's resistance to educational injustice in modern Indonesian literary texts is not merely reading stories; it is also uncovering realities long hidden behind words.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is grounded in the synergy between feminist literary theory, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and critical education theory—the three forming an interdisciplinary foundation that enables in-depth analysis of how modern Indonesian

literary texts present women's resistance to educational injustice. Feminist literary criticism is the fundamental starting point; this approach rejects purely textual readings and instead highlights how women's experiences are not merely represented but constructed within ideological and cultural domains. Elaine Showalter, a key figure in feminist literary criticism, introduced the concept of gynocriticism—a critical strategy that focuses on how women write and reflect their own experiences, rather than merely responding to masculine traditions (Showalter, 1981). Thus, feminist criticism-based readings of texts do not simply ask whether women are given roles, but how they create their own narratives—including narratives of education as a field of struggle.

While feminist theory opens up space for women's identity as narrative and social subjects, CDA expands the stage by highlighting how language and narrative structures themselves become instruments of ideology and power. Norman Fairclough, a major figure in CDA, sees language not as a mechanical system of switches but as a social practice imbued with ideology; discourse is the arena where power relations are reproduced and reshaped, including in fictional narrative texts (Fairclough, 1989). Fairclough introduced a three-dimensional analytical framework: the text itself (micro-analysis of linguistic structures), discourse practice (how texts are produced, circulated, and received), and socio-cultural practice (broader institutional and ideological contexts) (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 2001). Through this approach, the study not only analyzes language structures—such as lexical choice, metaphor, and syntax—but also understands how a female character's narrative acquires resistive meaning within the context of unequal educational practice.

Furthermore, Fairclough asserts that power as ideology can operate behind discourse—often implicitly—“*power behind discourse*”—shaping the limits of what can be said or circulated in a text (Fairclough, 2001). In literary contexts, women's education is not merely background or theme; the narrative language used provides an ideological pathway that either sustains or challenges gender stereotypes. For example, descriptions of educational institutions in novels that symbolically restrict women's access are often presented in neutral language, whereas discursive scrutiny reveals hidden patriarchal “*power behind discourse*.” While Fairclough focuses on social practice and text, Teun van Dijk enriches this approach with a cognitive dimension. Van Dijk emphasizes that discourse is reflected not only in textual structures and social contexts but also through collectively produced mental structures—cognitive models, mental schemas, and shared ideologies (van Dijk, 2006). Therefore, in reading women's resistance to educational injustice, researchers need to probe how discourse shapes and is shaped by female characters' self-representation and by readers, and how subversive, liberating ideas of education emerge (or are normalized) through readers' cognitive frameworks. This process shows that women's resistance in texts depends not only on concrete actions but also on how discourse breaks or internalizes dominant norms through mental models.

This eclectic CDA framework enables layered readings of texts: text as linguistic product; discourse as social interaction; and ideology and norms guiding the production and

interpretation of narrative. With the synergy of feminist theory and CDA, the study can excavate how education appears in texts both as a symbol of empowerment and as a contested field—where women confront masculine narratives that redefine education as an instrument of reproducing injustice. Even so, another crucial dimension cannot be ignored: education itself as an ideological practice. Paulo Freire developed critical pedagogy, which is highly relevant here. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire sharply criticizes the traditional “banking model” of education, which treats students as empty objects to be filled by teachers rather than critical subjects striving for transformation (Freire, 1970). Freire emphasizes that authentic education occurs through dialogue, critical consciousness (*conscientização*), and reflective action. Narratives of women’s education in modern literature often visualize the struggle not only to gain access to education but to become active intellectual subjects—precisely the problem-posing model that rejects the passive appropriation of knowledge (Freire, 1970).

Integrating Freire’s theory into literary analysis opens new insights: women’s education as narrative is not only about obtaining a place in academic spaces but about claiming a voice, dismantling structures of domination, and creating new knowledge that challenges hegemonic narratives. For example, literary characters who criticize an educational system that ideologically constrains women are subject to the logic of the “*banking model*.” When a novel presents female characters who speak, write, or demand dialogic space, this is not merely strong plotting but an embodiment of critical education that gains meaning within Freire’s theoretical framework. Thus, these three major theories—feminist literary criticism, CDA, and Freirean critical pedagogy—interweave into a robust analytical framework for understanding how literary texts present women’s resistance to educational injustice. Feminist criticism foregrounds women’s identity as agents; CDA excavates how language and discourse create, challenge, or reproduce ideology; and critical education theory positions education as a field of ideological action and transformation.

When the three are brought together as a single analytical whole, the study does not stop at describing whether female characters obtain education or not, but also probes narrative structure, language, accompanying ideology, and the dialogic dimension—how the characters speak back to the system. Such narratives are substantively important because, in modern Indonesian literature, education is not merely a topic but a discursive field and a symbol of power relations, a narrative of struggle, and a horizon of liberation. This interdisciplinary approach also shows that critical interpretation of literary texts is not only for textual scholars but is important for educators, gender activists, and general readers who wish to understand how literary culture can act as a social catalyst. Such analysis not only deepens our intellectual grasp of the text but also expands the text’s potential as an instrument of social transformation. Literature becomes an arena where women’s education is not only fought for but also visualized as a dialogic process, critical consciousness, and liberation—precisely the blend of theories that explains it.

C. METHOD

This study is qualitative in nature, employing a descriptive-interpretive, analytical-critical approach. Qualitative research is chosen because the focus lies in deepening meanings, power relations, and discursive constructions in literary texts—elements that cannot be explained through numbers or statistics but through interpretive understanding of narrative and linguistic structures. This approach allows the researcher to trace how educational injustice against women is represented in modern Indonesian literary texts and how the character's resist both symbolically and explicitly. The interdisciplinary approach combines three main theoretical frameworks: feminist literary criticism, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and critical education theory. Feminist literary criticism is used to explore the representation of women as subjects in literary texts, while CDA enables a reading of how language is used to shape and convey gender ideology and power.

Paulo Freire's critical education theory provides the understanding that education is a political domain that enables resistance to oppressive social structures. The data consist of modern Indonesian literary texts, particularly novels and short stories by Indonesian authors after the 1990s that explicitly or implicitly present female characters who experience injustice in access to education and strive to resist such conditions. Data collection techniques include literature review and documentation by selecting, reading, identifying, and noting relevant parts of literary texts containing thematic indications of education, gender inequality, and forms of resistance. The primary instrument is the researcher as the key instrument, equipped with theoretical understanding, gender sensitivity, and experience in critically reading and analyzing literary texts.

The researcher acts as an active reader who interprets the content of texts not only at the surface narrative level but also through underlying linguistic structures, symbolism, and discourse. Data analysis proceeds in several stages: (1) data reduction, namely sorting linguistic and narrative data directly related to the issue of resistance to educational injustice; (2) data presentation in the form of narrative quotations and contextual interpretation; and (3) drawing thematic and theoretical conclusions based on the interrelation among data, social context, and the selected theoretical frameworks. The analysis is iterative to capture subtle nuances of meaning and to read ideologies that may be implicitly embedded in the texts. To ensure the validity of findings, theoretical triangulation is used by comparing readings of the data across the three theories in a cross-checking manner. In addition, validation is conducted through peer review, whereby preliminary findings are discussed with literature and gender experts to avoid subjective bias and to enrich interpretations. Interpretive consistency is maintained through systematic note-taking and analytic reflection throughout the research process. With this methodology, the study aims to produce sharp, valid, and relevant analysis in depicting how female characters in modern Indonesian literary texts fight for access to education as a form of resistance to the structural injustices they experience.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Educational Injustice as Experienced and Depicted by Female Characters in Modern Indonesian Literary Texts

Educational injustice in modern Indonesian literature is an important theme that reveals the relationship among gender, power, and oppressive social structures. Female characters in various works often mirror real women's struggles to access education—not only as a formal institution but as a symbol of emancipation, self-recognition, and liberation from entrenched patriarchy. An important example appears in Oka Rusmini's *Kenanga*, which portrays Balinese women living within a rigid caste system and patriarchal tradition. In it, education becomes a symbolic battleground between women and social structures that position them as subordinate. Luh Intan, a woman of the sudra caste, is depicted as breaking into higher education through the Sipenmaru exam. This achievement resists the stereotype that women of lower castes are unfit for higher education. As noted by Ari Minarni (2018) in her thesis *Representasi Perlawanan Perempuan Terhadap Patriarki Dalam Novel Kenanga Karya Oka Rusmini (Tinjauan Feminisme Posmodern)*, "Luh Intan can prove that a sudra woman who is looked down upon like herself can pursue higher education and pass the Sipenmaru test" (p. 48). Here, educational injustice is depicted through cultural and structural barriers that link social status to access to educational institutions.

Meanwhile, the character Kenanga in the same novel also illustrates women's struggle to make education an instrument of liberation. Kenanga chooses not to marry so that she can focus on building her identity and maintaining her independence. She rejects the domestic role traditionally attached to women, and for her, education is not merely learning, but a way to take control of her life. "Kenanga dares to speculate that an educated woman can live single like Kenanga," writes Minarni (2018, p. 52), describing how education can renegotiate women's position in a patriarchal society. By contrast, the character Kemuning shows failure in sustaining her educational struggle because she submits to social norms requiring her to marry a man of the brahmana caste. This demonstrates the strength of patriarchal pressure that renders marriage the logical endpoint for women, thereby obstructing or even nullifying their pursuit of education. In this narrative, education is not only about academic access but is also closely bound to social control over women's bodies and life choices.

Educational injustice is also starkly present in Adenita's *9 Matahari*. The novel tells the story of Matari—known as Tari—who comes from a poor family yet is determined to complete higher education. Education is portrayed as expensive, arduous, and risky, especially for women from lower economic classes. Tari must work part-time, borrow money, and even fall ill to continue her studies. The narrative states: "In order to pursue her dream of graduating, Matari is forced into debt and willing to work part-time to pay for college. As a result, she often falls ill and nearly despairs." (*9 Matahari*, 2013, p. 112).

Tari's experience shows that women face not just structural barriers but a double burden as students and workers who must be economically self-reliant.

The novel also depicts how gender stereotypes haunt women in educational spaces. Tari is often seen as weak, emotional, and unsuited to the rigors of academia. Such views show that educational injustice manifests not only through material barriers but also through ideologies and social norms that belittle women's intellect. As revealed in Hikmah's (2013) thesis *Perjuangan Tokoh Utama Dalam Novel 9 Matahari Karya Adenita: Tinjauan Feminisme Liberal*, "Matari experiences psychological pressure because she is considered unfit to be in a higher-education environment dominated by men or by women from the middle and upper classes" (p. 37). This indicates that access to education does not automatically guarantee equality, as symbolic discrimination persists in the form of exclusion, judgment, and moral pressure. In Ken Terate's *Minoel*, educational injustice is not delivered explicitly but can be traced through a social construction rife with violence and oppression against women. The main female character lives in an environment saturated with physical and symbolic violence. In Putri's (2023) thesis *Analisis Wacana Kritis Perempuan Dalam Novel Minoel Karya Ken Terate*, the forms of oppression include domestic violence, bodily control, and exclusion from public spaces (pp. 64–70). When women live amid fear, trauma, and restricted mobility, education recedes far from reach. Indeed, an educational narrative does not surface explicitly because the social structure has already foreclosed the possibility from the outset. This is the most fundamental form of educational injustice: the systematic marginalization of women's intellectual potential from the domestic and cultural spheres.

Across the three texts—*Kenanga*, *9 Matahari*, and *Minoel*—women's educational injustice is heavily influenced by three main factors: patriarchal social structures, family economics, and symbolic violence. In the context of patriarchy, as portrayed in *Kenanga*, women are often deemed unworthy of education for reasons of custom, caste, or supposed biological destiny. In the economic context, as in *9 Matahari*, financial constraints become the principal barrier limiting access to formal educational institutions. In the context of violence, as in *Minoel*, women cannot even contemplate education because their lives are consumed by surviving oppression, trauma, and violence. Yet the three protagonists also show forms of resistance to the systems that oppress them. They do not simply accept destinies determined by culture or economics. Rather, they make education a battleground—both symbolically and concretely. In this sense, education in literary texts functions not only as a theme but as an instrument of social critique that exposes injustice and offers hope for liberation.

2. Forms of Resistance Employed by Female Characters Against Educational Injustice?

In Oka Rusmini's *Kenanga*, female characters' resistance to educational injustice appears in complex forms: internal, cultural, social, and verbal. Dermawana et al. (2023) note that *Kenanga* and Luh Intan practice gender resistance across multiple dimensions—not merely explicit refusal but profound internal and symbolic resistance. Internal resistance is recorded in the personal conviction that women are entitled to equal education, an attitude that becomes the inner energy freeing them from customary restraints. For example, Luh Intan, born into the sudra caste, persists in completing the Sipenmaru exam, proving her ability despite being belittled. Cultural resistance is shown when *Kenanga* firmly rejects norms that position women in subordinate roles. Dermawana et al. state that *Kenanga* “dares to resist Balinese customs and cultural traditions” and radically prioritizes education for women—even choosing to live independently. Here, education is not merely an academic goal but a form of resistance against patriarchal notions that demand women's subservience to men.

Social resistance is also evident in *Kenanga*'s interactions at home, especially in opposing differential treatment of Intan because of caste. Dermawana et al. explain that *Kenanga* rejects negative labeling of Intan and treats her lovingly like a Brahmana child. Such actions resist cultural stereotypes and class domination—values typically embedded in patterns of girls' education. Verbal resistance appears when *Kenanga* firmly counters her mother's disparaging remarks about Intan. In Widyaparwa's analysis (pp. 52–54), when the mother keeps denigrating Intan, *Kenanga* says in a firm yet pleading tone: “Forgive me, Mother, but let Intan grow as she should.” This is not invective but feminist assertiveness that defends women's dignity and right to learn even within a patriarchal family.

In Adenita's *9 Matahari*, the female character's resistance takes a pragmatic existential form. Hikmah (2013) explores how *Matari*, the protagonist, frees herself from economic loneliness and patriarchy. She works hard, takes part-time jobs, incurs debt to finance her studies, and eventually becomes a broadcaster and active member of campus TV—a symbol of accession to the public sphere and recognition as an intellectual individual. Hikmah notes that “*Matari* manages to free herself from her father's selfishness and poverty by realizing her dream of graduating, then existing as a broadcaster, MC, and CTV member.” Her resistance is existential because she not only confronts obstacles but proves that a marginalized woman can become an integral part of academic and social life. This social transformation and self-affirmation show that education is a tool of liberation, not merely a privilege. Here, education and work are not alternatives but necessities for asserting women's identity and potential as active subjects.

By contrast, in Ken Terate's *Minoel*, although education is not discussed explicitly, women's resistance appears through endurance within oppressive systems and symbolic and physical violence. According to Putri (2023), the women live amid harsh, patriarchal

social structures yet dare to dream and maintain self-worth in their own narratives. Resistance in this context lies in maintaining identity and dignity as intellectual women, even when institutional access to education is tightly closed by power and trauma. This resistance takes the form of inner wholeness, steadfastness, and the creation of personal spaces free from symbolic oppression.

Overall, the three modern Indonesian texts show that women's resistance to educational injustice emerges in various forms. In *Kenanga*, it is richest: internal, cultural, social, and verbal. In *9 Matahari*, resistance is realized through the courage to take active roles in education and society. In *Minoel*, resistance is existential—maintaining identity and integrity amid oppressive environments. Taken together, these women present an inspiring spectrum of resistance. They do not always stage open rebellion, but through life choices, attitudes, and language, they create new narratives about women's education. Here, education is not only knowledge but a symbol of empowerment, independence, and the assertion of dignity.

3. Constructing the Discourse of Resistance in Literary Texts (Narrative Structure, Characterization, and the Symbolism of Education)

The discourse of women's resistance to educational injustice in modern Indonesian literature is carefully staged through narrative construction, character development, and rich educational symbolism. These elements are especially strong in characters such as *Kenanga* and *Luh Intan* in Oka Rusmini's *Kenanga*. Dermawana and colleagues highlight that the novel's plot is flashback-driven, with descriptive focus on how the protagonist fights patriarchal culture and a caste system that disqualifies women from social and educational mobility (Dermawana et al., 2023, p. 1). This structure allows a reflective construction of resistance, inviting readers to grasp past cultural pressures that persist into *Kenanga*'s present acts of resistance.

Characterization is likewise dynamic in presenting a discourse of liberation. *Kenanga* is portrayed as ambitious, rejecting purely domestic roles and breaking Balinese traditions that limit women so that she can “live independently without being bound by patriarchal rules.” As discussed in analyses of *Kenanga* and *Intan*, *Kenanga* is determined to educate her daughter, *Intan*, to be an individual who “is ambitious and refuses to be defeated by tradition” (Septiningsih, cited in her study on educational equality and cultural resistance, p. 18). This shows education as a symbol of defiance against social labeling that women belong in the domestic sphere. The novel's Balinese traditional setting becomes a field of conflict between modernity and custom. Sunarti (2021, p. 1) explains that Oka Rusmini critiques Balinese patriarchy through dialogues and the narratives of female characters who seek to change old stories about their identity; education becomes for them a point of negotiation between custom and gender equality. Within this broad narrative structure, education is symbolized as a dialogic space between tradition and modernity—where female characters neutralize “the separation of roles” between men and women by positing education as an alternative path to freedom.

The structure of *Kenanga* also deploys the symbol of education's forward motion as an emotional trajectory. Each woman's step into education is presented through layered plotting—not only academic struggle but symbolic resistance to gender oppression. Even when schooling is not directly dialogued, the contexts of class and ritual are pierced by choices made by *Kenanga* and *Intan* to demand education—so that “education” functions as a symbol of self-empowerment amid traditional constraints. In *9 Matahari*, the narrative likewise supports the symbolism of education as resistance. *Matari*, from a limited economic background, “must work part-time and incur debt for college” (Hikmah, 2013, p. 37), a story that frames education as an existential battleground. The narrative centers on survival and study, giving readers symbolic space to witness education as hope and resistance to social determinism.

Structure and characterization in *9 Matahari* link education to possession of a public voice. When *Matari* becomes a broadcaster and member of campus CTV, the transformation is symbolic: education opens access to public spheres long closed to poor women. Hikmah argues that *Matari*'s existence as a graduate and broadcaster proves that education cultivates access to social legitimacy (Hikmah, 2013, p. 47). Thus, the symbol of education serves as an instrument of social legitimacy and resistance to assumptions of gender and class inferiority. Meanwhile, in Ken Terate's *Minoel*, although education is not highlighted explicitly, symbolism is built through depictions of violence and implicit resistance. Narratives about girls not being allowed to attend school—being pushed to finish only up to senior high or even less—depict a structurally exclusive education system. One review notes that “young girls in the country's remote areas are still considered unnecessary to attend school ... in the end they are only expected to become someone's wife” (review of *Minoel*, dionyulianto, p. 1). Such narrative structures show education as a socially rejected option, so that the most basic desire becomes a symbol of resistance when a character like *Minoel* strives to escape cycles of poverty and patriarchal expectations.

Minoel herself becomes an icon of resistance: she has a “progressive mindset,” wants to go to college and work—representing education as a door to modernity and opportunity (review of *Minoel*, dionyulianto, p. 2). Though “weak in certain subjects,” she excels at singing—indicating that character and talent become symbolic routes to upholding dignity and breaking the narrative that rural women need not study further (review of *Minoel*, dionyulianto, p. 2). In these narrative constructions, education is not merely a diploma but the embodiment of identity and empowerment. Overall, the discourse of resistance through education in modern Indonesian texts is subtly yet powerfully built. Narrative structures involving flashbacks, converging plots, and the setting of tradition versus modernity enable education to be staged as a symbol of social dialogue. Characterization asserts education as a space of identity contestation, forming self-aware women who reject subordination. Educational symbolism—whether as access to the public sphere, a tool for cultural negotiation, or a symbol of hope for marginalized women—builds a strong and inspiring discourse of resistance.

Together, these elements show that education in modern literary texts is not merely an academic need, but an ideological and symbolic field where women struggle, voice themselves, and affirm identity. This discourse of resistance does not always appear through overtly heroic acts; it often manifests as inner resolve, the decision to remain in school, to cultivate intellect within patriarchal culture, or simply to nurture hope for equality through education. Such is the power of narrative structure, characterization, and educational symbolism: they collectively move women's resistance into fiction while sparking intellectual and social reflection in the modern reader.

4. Representations of Resistance to Educational Injustice Enrich Gender and Education Discourse in Contemporary Indonesian Society

Representations of women's resistance to educational injustice in modern Indonesian literature do not merely tell stories of brave protagonists. They expand gender and education discourse by reflecting the complexity of social relations, challenging patriarchal structures, and opening more inclusive and critical conversations in contemporary contexts. First, literature becomes an effective medium for voicing critique against gender hegemony. As Yulianeta notes, "literary works are a form of education that can teach without lecturing, instruct without commanding, and provide examples without explicitly pointing them out" (imagery of struggle in the reform era). In the discourse of education, this means that stories depicting women breaking educational barriers offer subtle yet powerful social lessons—staging resistance not through moralizing, but by immersing readers in these struggles. Further, literary resistance to educational injustice unsettles the dominant patriarchal discourse that deems education not a female domain. For example, in the sastra wangi movement led by Ayu Utami, the novel *Saman* boldly explores sexuality, politics, and education. Utami shows how female characters can be depicted as intellectually authoritative and free to make choices. Campbell notes that the linguistic structure in *Saman* positions female characters as "self-empowered and independent, capable of making their own decisions."

This contributes to broadening gender discourse, as contemporary literature increasingly portrays women as intellectual agents rather than passive figures. Such representation enriches the understanding that education for women is not merely a nominal right but also a political tool and a discourse of social transformation. In addition, the Nusantara feminist historical consciousness that mobilizes education as a field of emancipation is reinforced by literature as a reflective cultural medium. Wiyatmi's dissertation notes that from the Kartini era to the modern period, literature has voiced women's equality and education, embedding ideas such as the right to learn as reflective appeals to readers and marking a convergence between the history of struggle and contemporary educational dimensions.

Literary narratives that position women as active make education an arena of symbolic and political struggle. This then permeates formal education discourse and policy—prompting the integration of critical education and gender mainstreaming into curricula

and pedagogical approaches, as discussed in literature-based education approaches. Literature becomes an ally of education, presenting gender discourse narratively and accessibly, and fostering social awareness that is not aridly theoretical. In practice, such narratives cultivate empathy and critical understanding. A PBSI student, Herliana (2025), states that “women’s negative experiences, often unnoticed due to patriarchal hegemony, can gain space to affirm women’s social status and assert their rights” through literature. Literature becomes a space of reflection for readers, raising awareness that women’s education is not merely a personal issue but a structural one requiring social engagement.

Moreover, these representations encourage the redefinition of women’s identity in the public sphere. Female characters who take active roles in education—as learners, educators, or community organizers—have broad implications for gender discourse. Historical figures such as Dewi Sartika or Rahmah el Yunusiyah are reintroduced in literary discourse and research as inspirations for women’s critical education—providing historical weight and conceptualizing education as a transformative social tool (Dewi Sartika founded schools for wives in the early twentieth century; Rahmah el Yunusiyah formed women’s study groups). Through the synergy of literature and history, women’s resistance to educational injustice enriches contemporary educational narratives. It creates a discourse integrating cultural heritage with the demands of modernity, promoting education that is inclusive, creative, and gender-sensitive. This is crucial because education today is a field for reconstructing social values, and literature offers a bridge of values, context, and the spirit of resistance. Equally important, these representations go beyond the academic realm—they hold potential to influence policy and educational practice. By illustrating individual struggles to access education, literary works provide concrete examples that can inspire pedagogical practice, the development of learning materials, and case- and narrative-based policy advocacy.

Ultimately, such representations enrich gender and education discourse in Indonesia today by adding aesthetic, narrative, historical, and practical dimensions. Literature does not merely deliver critique; it animates the idea of equality through stories that engage and move readers. It shapes a new discursive framework—that women’s education is not merely formal permission, but the realization of liberated identity, social relations, and sustained equality.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is evident that the discourse of educational injustice against women in modern Indonesian literature appears not merely as a social issue but as a narrative device that expands the space for gender and education discourse in contemporary society. The representations of resistance by female characters in texts such as Oka Rusmini’s *Kenanga*, Adenita’s *9 Matahari*, and Ken Terate’s *Minoel* show that resistance to educational injustice is neither singular nor linear; it appears in various forms and levels. Educational injustice in these texts is depicted as the product of patriarchal social structures, class inequality, and customary restrictions. Female characters such as

Kenanga and Intan are not only portrayed as facing limited access to formal education, but also as experiencing symbolic oppression that shackles their right to intellectual growth. In this context, education becomes a symbol of resistance—not only against the system but also against social constructions that place women in subordinate positions. Women who insist on learning, teaching, and engaging in the public sphere are portrayed as active agents of change who transcend the domestic roles long attached to them.

The forms of resistance shown by these female characters are diverse. Some are verbal and direct, such as Kenanga rebuking her mother for belittling a child of the sudra caste, and others are existential and quiet, such as Matari in *9 Matahari*, who works hard to finance her education amid economic and familial pressures. Resistance is not always a grand rebellion but also small decisions with major significance: choosing to stay in school, working to pay tuition, refusing early marriage, or writing and speaking in public. The discourse of resistance is cohesively built through narrative structure, strong characterization, and deep educational symbolism. Storylines that braid past and present, complex and determined female characters, and symbols such as schools, books, and work in the public sphere all collaborate to form a narrative of liberation. In these texts, education is not merely an academic space but a field of social and identity struggle where women redefine their existence and roles.

In the end, the representation of resistance to educational injustice in literary works not only mirrors social reality but also enriches and deepens gender and education discourse in Indonesia. It opens new space for critical thought about how education can be a tool of liberation, how women can become subjects of discourse, and how literature can play an important role in changing social consciousness. In a society that is still striving to eliminate gender inequality in education, such literary works make an important contribution to a more just and inclusive future.

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