



---

## Gender Discourse In The Writings Of Raja Rao

**PALAK CHANDNA** Department of Humanities, Graphic Era Hill University,  
Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India 248002

---

### ABSTRACT

The "sex" and "gender" debates always flare up whenever the topic of gender is broached. Gender is a cultural construction, in contrast to the biological category of sex. Based on these myths, society places men and women in different positions. The female is often the focal point of any discussion on gender. Culture and society both have biases against women. Gender is a feminist concept, but sexism against males has been under-analyzed, making this an exclusively female concern. Discourse analysis of gender as an interdisciplinary field of research. Sociology, linguistics, communication, anthropology, psychology, and literature are all part of this umbrella term. Discourse really serves as a lens through which gender inequality may be examined.

**KEYWORDS** Gender, Disorder, Raja Rao, women.

### INTRODUCTION

Social scientists investigate society and social behavior using a variety of conceptual words as analytical categories. Concepts help social scientists create useful categories for studying social behavior scientifically. Several such principles serve as a basis for the study of gender dynamics and behavior. For instance, Ill Matthews, in her 1984 exploration of how femininity is constructed, pioneered the idea of gender. Mathews argues that the idea of gender accounts for the universal practice of classifying people into gendered categories. Therefore, the term/concept of gender is a methodical means of studying the social patterns between men and women. The study of male domination in society is aided by the idea of patriarchy. Gender is a useful lens through which to examine the ways in which men and women differ, whether those differences have their roots in biology or were imposed on them by culture. Some species of trout are more stereotypically male or female due to the conceptions of masculinity and femininity. We will be covering some groundwork here. Sex, gender, patriarchy, and the definitions of male and female are all part of these ideas. These notions are foundational to our understanding of the societal disparities between men and women, and they are central to feminist texts and Gender Studies discourses. These ideas may be studied since they serve as valuable analytical categories.

It has been theorized that men and women are fundamentally different, both mentally and physically, due to their biological distinctions. In their view, males are inherently more capable than women in every way. Some thinkers argue that the perceived biological differences between the sexes are overstated. The patriarchal structure of society, in which males are seen as superior to women, is a major social factor contributing to these disparities. As a result, women in our culture are subservient to males.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**M.E.P. Ranmuthugala (2019)** This study focuses on the construction of female identities in the book *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao in terms of the brand of nationalism advocated by Mahatma Gandhi. The novel was published in 1938. Despite playing a pivotal role and possessing political agency, this analytical research article posits that women's identities are shaped by males to further the masculine nationalist agenda: The study argues that women, in order to fully embrace nationalism, must undergo a metamorphosis and refashion their identities. The book tackles a wide range of topics, including nationalism, religion, caste, sexuality, and feminism, and makes a compelling case for Mahatma Gandhi's political philosophy of empowering the people. This study examines nationalism in depth by reading closely and analyzing its representations of imagined communities, the education of women, and the tension between modernity and traditionalism. Regarding Mahatma Gandhi's asexual attribution to females, the research also makes extensive use of gender and feminist theory, as well as performativity theory. The purpose of this study is to examine whether or not Rao's book *Kanthapura* can be seen as a feminist literature that promotes women's agency, particularly in the context of politics and nationalism.

## **GENDER DISCOURSE AND INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION**

It was not until the 1970s that feminism started to see gender as something intrinsic to the way the 'body' functions but rather as a social identity that is constructed, enacted, and maintained by social institutions. Feminist theory is the theoretical foundation upon which Gender Studies was built. In her book *Sexual Politics* (1969), Kate Millett made the case that although women are born, they must be made. She believed that although sex may be established at birth, gender is more of an artificial construct. Many detractors agreed with the idea that although "sex" is unchangeable, "gender" is fluid and debatable. Therefore, there is a fundamental distinction between the two.

Feminist theorists were challenging a key tenet of classical humanism when they argued that gender plays no role in determining one's identity. They were instead adopting the fluid social constructivist theory. Critics of the changing gender norms have shown essentialism to be wrong by emphasizing the subjectivity of

self (identity). As a result, they are in a constant state of flux; man and woman, male and female, and masculine and feminine gender equations all include a binary opposition that draws attention to the precariousness of their connection.

The notion of gender discourse arrived late to the developing world, notably India. Indian men still didn't pierce their ears or take up permanent residence in the kitchen until the very last decade of the twentieth century. With the advent of globalization, however, the landscape has shifted dramatically, and now studies of both sexes and the LGBT community are being treated with equal seriousness. Many movies and books are now being written on social constructivism.

Literature is a cultural artifact that changes through time in response to the social and political climate of the country. This disproves the long-held belief that Indian English literature developed primarily as a parody of colonial society since fiction (and the novel in particular) originated in the West. A closer look into Indian literature (in its many dialects) indicates, however, that fiction has been there for a long time; its rise to prominence among English writers was just a question of time and exposure. Gender issues were a focal point of this fictional work. For a variety of historical and political causes, early Indian English writing displayed a preoccupation with feminism. Fiction produced from a female perspective shed light on these mostly unaddressed problems. The "women's question" was eventually superseded by "gender awareness," which widened its focus beyond women's concerns to include those of a third gender as well. This collection of essays makes an effort to investigate the many topics that are presently posing a threat to our traditionally male-dominated culture.

Discourse analysis of gender as an interdisciplinary field of research. Many more disciplines than those listed above are also part of this umbrella. Discourse really serves as a reflective lens through which gender inequality may be examined. In 1975, three volumes were published that are considered to have marked the beginning of the study of male/female dialectics via the study of discourse: *Language and Woman's Place* by Robin Lakoff, *Male/Female Language* by Mary Ritchie Key, and *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance* by Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley. As part of the Feminist movement that arose in the 1970s, when individuals were beginning to question the distinction between biological "sex" and the socio-cultural construct of "gender," these publications appeared. The study of language was considered a potent instrument for examining gender differences. Research in this area progressed in the years that followed with publications like *Talk in Women's Groups* (Johnson and Aries, 1983); *Studies of Social Language*.

Narrative technique (Philips et al.); Johnstone (1990). Price (1986), Todd and Fisher (1988), Coates and Cameron (1989), Cameron (1990), etc., are only a few of the editors that have published anthologies. *When Language and Masculinity* by

Johnson and Meinhof came out in 1997, it was a watershed moment for how men spoke. Here, Tannen discovers a trend in which guys are more likely to assume the expert position while females shy away from it while having conversations with other men.

Thus, a social constructivist approach is typical in studies examining gender and language use. Scholars now concur with gender theorist Judith Butler (1990, 1993) that the "meaning" of gender is culturally constructed, marking a complete circle in the study of gender. Specifically, she adopts the recently trendy per formative approach that creates gender "through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices" (1993:227).

This anthology's goal is not to promote any one specific theoretical agenda but rather to explore the many facets of gender studies, including discussions of women, men, and non-binary gender identities. The writings were picked to reflect this viewpoint and to span this breadth of subject matter. They do not claim to forward a single goal, but rather to represent the many critical, cultural, and sociological interests of academics whose work focuses on texts that address issues of gender. By approaching Indian English literature with a new perspective, these works provide original and groundbreaking research.

Feminism's concept is liberating, and when applied to literature, it frees works from the constraints of form and genre and makes them more relevant to contemporary issues. It has implications for a holistic, interdisciplinary strategy whose

was not to replace the authoritative male subject at the centre of traditional historiography with a powerful female subject who would rewrite history and repossess the authority of the self. By focussing on the denials, repressions and blank spaces that made a certain kind of history possible, feminism sought to re-examine questions of authority and self-making, to expose the tensions of a concealed dialectic that runs through the apparently homogenous texture of recorded history, and to restore, as one theorist puts it, 'conflict, ambiguity and tragedy to the historical process'. Moreover it articulated and made audible voices that had always been there, for the texts of the world are never monologic: they speak to those who will listen, whether through apparent silence or through the murmurs of the dispossessed – even at times in the cultured tones of the naturalized subject who cannot reflect on her dispossession. Most importantly, feminist scholarship asked new, difficult questions about identity, selfhood, the shaping of the world by culture, and the practise and possibility of writing (Chaudhury:1-2).

Although the roots of feminism in India may be traced back to the time of the great literati like Gargi, Maitrei, etc., who created a new world, Indian English literature (a late progeny of English proper) was even later to experience the warm breezes of the Feminist movement. Feminism first had an impact on Indian English Literature, particularly fiction, in the 1960s, during the Second Wave. However, it was originally males who took the initiative to publish works by women. According to the feminist author Helene Cixous, men and women are,

caught up in a network of millennial cultural determinations of a complexity that is almost unanalysable: we can no more talk about 'woman' than about 'man' without getting caught up in an ideological theatre where the multiplicity of representations, images, reflections, myths, identifications, constantly transforms, deforms, alters each person's imaginary order and in advance all conceptualizations null and void (248).

One of the early Indian English authors, Mulk Raj Anand was also one of the earliest to criticize gender injustice in traditional Indian culture via his writing. His female protagonists embody many of the characteristics of the "new woman," including rebellion, resistance, education, and economic independence. Both Sohini (*The Untouchable*) and Leila (*Two Leaves and a Bud*) speak out against sexual assault, one by a high-caste Hindu priest and the other by a white foreigner. After the death of her perfect spouse, Janki takes a stand in *The Big Heart* against the abuse of widows and declares her love for Ananta. R. K. Narayan, like many other authors, is concerned with sex equality and often features strong female heroines. His female protagonists have an endearingly raw power that proves the contemporary Indian lady is not a myth. Characters like Savitri in "The Dark Room," "Rosie" in "The Guide," and "Bala" in "Grandmother's Tale" all develop and leave permanent marks on the Indian psyche. Women in Narayan are known for their confidence, independence, and strength. They develop autonomy, which benefits both them and the stability of their male relatives.

In the same way that Narayan's progressive views on women are abundantly represented in his fiction, so too are Raja Rao's. The characters of Achakka and Rangamma, for instance, stand for the societal and cultural shifts that have taken place in Kanthapura and India more generally. Despite being stuck in the past, they demonstrate that Indian women can welcome innovation and play a key role in the rebuilding process. Again, in *The Serpent and the Rope*, Raja Rao stands in for the ideal woman who incorporates ideas from the Upanishad, the Dharmashastras, the Mahabharata, and the contemporary image of the west. Therefore, Lakshmi, Savitri, and Madeline, in this context, all embody that unity.

But in depicting powerful female characters, another brilliant author, Salman Rushdie, seriously fell short. His depiction of a chauvinist society, in which women are consistently submissive to men, is characteristic of his work. But he said that

he had always aimed to write strong female protagonists in his fiction. His books, such as "Shame," "The Enchantress of Florence," and "The Ground Beneath Her Feet," all revolve on women. They are anticipated to break new ground by going against the grain of society. Sadly, however, they don't succeed. It doesn't matter how much havoc they may make in the social order, women will always be subservient to the men in their society.

The female protagonists Amitav Ghosh has developed are polar opposites. They're not feminist radicals and they don't look like the traditional satis from ancient times like Sita, Savitri, or Damayanti. Ghosh shows genuine empathy for his female characters, depicting them as fully realized human beings. They're emotional beings that struggle in life yet persevere in the face of overwhelming adversity. In *The Glass Palace*, Dolly, the Burmese princess's nurse, is a stand-in for every woman who has ever tried to juggle more than one function in life and found that she was happier without any of them. The demands of her duties as Raj Kumar's wife and later as Dinu's mother, however, force her to press on. As soon as she finishes what she set out to do, she joins a nunnery to follow her real calling. *The Hungry Tide* also has strong female protagonists, such as Nilima and Kusum, Piyali and Moyna, who each face their own unique challenges and show distinct facets of a life without a man. Amitav Ghosh's image of women reflects his hope for a future in which women would achieve equality with men and break free of patriarchy.

## **GENDER AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT IN LITERATURE AND MEDIA**

The conversation on "sex" and "gender" is sparked by any topic relating to gender. Gender, in contrast to sex, is seen as cultural rather than biological. Based on these myths, society constructs gender-based roles for men and women. Whenever gender is discussed, women are often the focal point. Cultural biases in society tend to be sexist. Gender equality should be the norm, but sexist attitudes toward males have prevented that from happening. The fact that we need laws to protect women from so many different types of unfairness is glaring evidence that women experience the most severe forms of bias. To provide for their families, male members of society were required to leave their homes and work outside, while women were supposed to stay at home and take care of the children and the household. However, as time went on, this seemingly neutral division of work morphed into explicit bias in the media's portrayal of the two groups. The disparity between the sexes is deeply ingrained in Indian culture.

How about we examine gender roles in Hinduism? When it comes to women, ancient Hindu culture had two distinct stances. There are others who feel that women exemplify everything that is good in society. The Goddesses of Vedic mythology represented ideals of female power and morality. Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Kali are all manifestations of the Hindu goddess Kali, who represents the forces of time and the passage of life and death. There are five strong female

characters in Hindu mythology, including Sita, Savitri, Ahalya, Draupadi, and Arundhati. Manusmriti, also known as the Manu Dharma Shastra, is revered as the Hindu Code of Conduct for everyday life in the home, in the community, and in religious practice. In reality, women were crucial decision-makers and instrumental in creating the groundwork for moral growth in Dharma.

Gender problems may have their origins and discourses in religious tenets and practices as well. Many feminist authors have researched Elizabethan religious ideas, especially as they relate to the witch-shaming of women in Jacobean and Elizabethan literature. Manusmriti and other religious scriptures, practices, and stories provide similar explanations for the historical persistence of sexism in India. All faiths teach that women are inferior to males and discriminate against them. The Buddhist canon, Vinaya, has several sexist restrictions and does not treat male and female monks equally. Therefore, Buddhism becomes a patriarchal power system that views women as lusty, sensual beings. A famous quote from The Collection of Jewels's "The Tale of King Udayana of Valsa" sums up the monks' overall perspective on nuns and women:

Women can be the cause of great suffering. If desire is destroyed, there will be everlasting happiness. The dead snake and dog are detestable, But women are even more detestable than they are (Sarkar 2).

A similar view of women is said to exist among the orthodox fundamentalist Christians. Women faced harsh punishments for speaking out against priestly practices, for engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage, for stealing, for masturbating in public, and for having children outside of wedlock. Christian mythology include figures like Joan of Arc, who was martyred for challenging church dogma by having her body burned at the stake. The status of women in society may be seen plainly in these incidents.

Another common misconception is that Islam places males on a higher social tier than women. Men have the legal freedom to marry several spouses, while women are limited to a single union. She risked punishment if she disobeyed her husband and the other male members of the family, who are the primary decision-makers in the household. According to popular belief, the position of women in a Muslim household and society has been explicitly delineated by religious Muslim leaders, philosophers, and intellectuals. All save her husband and close male relatives are allowed to see her without her veil, and she is expected to keep her distance from them. To learn that a lady who has been raped and then compelled to marry her abuser in order to save her family shame and misery is being accused of adultery is startling. Men have more legal rights to initiate divorce proceedings, whereas wives have no such protections. Making her hubby happy and content is her first priority. She was told to wear tattered garments, stay in the dark about important matters, and was barred from leaving the home too much.

Women were seen as selfish, lusty, dishonest, naive, unstable, deceptive, and evil in Hinduism, just as they were in other cultures. Women were relegated to a lesser status than males and were treated as property in the Hindu texts. Incredibly, discrimination against women based on their caste was commonplace in the past. Low caste women were not allowed to cover their upper bodies, but higher caste women were required to do so. A lady of a lower social class might still face discrimination and abuse in the modern world. However, some feminist intellectuals claim that the Manusmriti actively works to oppress women and the Dalit people.

B.R. Ambedkar, Sita Agarwal, Ruth Manorama, and Surendra Jondhale are just few of the reformers who believe this book was produced primarily for the wealthy at the expense of the poor. The humiliation and misery that characters like Draupadi, Sita, and Kunti go through at the expense of Dharma and also due of their limits as women is highlighted in a deep study of Indian epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Feminist problems were prioritized by political reformers in India, and they spoke out forcefully against religiously motivated tyranny. In his advocacy for gender equality, Mahatma Gandhi embraced the Hindu scriptural concept of Purush and Prakriti as one in which men and women shared equal responsibilities in the social, economic, and political spheres. As India became more urbanized and industrialized, new laws were enacted giving women the right to vote and modifying traditional social mores, such as the Hindu Marriage Act and the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, and the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971. One recent example of discrimination due to religious intolerance is the Shah Bano case from 1985. A watershed moment in the history of Indian law, it was met with much debate. Shah Bano was refused the alimony that she had been awarded by the Indian government, notwithstanding a previous judgement by the Supreme Court of India in her favor. Both the politically delicate Indian government and strict Muslim conservatism contributed to her downfall.

Feminists have addressed the pressing concerns of gender inequality and the perpetuation of traditional gender roles in the realms of religion, literature, and society at large. This is not a new issue for literary debate; it has been around long before feminism. The most heinous crimes against women have occurred throughout history and across cultures and religions, and they have nothing to do with a woman's caste, creed, or location. These crimes include child marriage, infanticide, feticide, physical abuse, illiteracy, unequal marital rights, divorce, dowry deaths, rape, molestation, inheritance, polygamy, widowhood, restrictions on widow remarriage, and Sati. The Hindu faith stressed on the husband being comparable to God ('Parmeshwar;') therefore women were born to serve males, linked with familial bondages, and forced to be thrown onto the cremation pyre of



their husbands. Extreme types of tyranny were used in the name of religion against widows who chose to continue living after the death of their spouses. Widows in Hindu culture are expected to conform to societal norms, and one of them is cutting off long hair. She was also forbidden from participating in the family's joyous celebrations or even wearing jewelry. She was restricted from covering her feet, wearing bright and fancy clothing, and could only subsist on boring, everyday fare. Even worse, she was subjected to sexual abuse at the hands of her own relatives.

Raja Rao's works, especially *Javani* and *Akkayya*, show a profound awareness of women's exploitation. One exposes the hollowness of superstitious practices, while the other tells the tragic story of a widow from the low caste Ganju community who is mistreated and neglected by her own family. *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *Some Inner Fury* (1955), two of Kamala Markandaya's first works, uphold the stereotypical portrayal of women as nurturing, submissive, and selfless. *Sita* is portrayed as a conventional woman who is torn between traditional notions of so-called morality and her husband Rama's adultery in the short novel *Absolution* by Dina Mehta. The exploitative husband uses the obedient wife's principles, education, and low social status to get what he wants, while the woman takes the humiliation of his treachery in stride.

## CONCLUSION

Men and women are defined in detail. It also describes the ideal characteristics of both men and women. It establishes norms to govern the conduct of males and females. Butler finds that sex is a social category in and of itself. Some feminist authors disagree with Butler's view that "sex" has a primarily biological basis. Finally, we may claim that socialist feminism is the most dynamic subset of the feminist movement. They have examined women's issues by using the theoretical framework of Marx and Engels. Socialist feminists succeed in mobilizing oppressed women to take part in the fight. Many detractors agreed with the idea that although "sex" is unchangeable, "gender" is a fluid and debatable category. Therefore, there is a primary distinction between them.

## REFERENCE

1. Ranmuthugala, M.E.P. (2019). Widows and concubines: Tradition and deviance in the women of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. *Journal of International Women's Studies*. 20. 51-61.
2. Agnihotri, G. N. "Cited in *Indian Life and the problems in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan*." Shalabh Book House, 1984, Print.
3. Bold, S. R. *Politics of a Revolutionary Elite: A study of Mulk Raj Anand's Novels*. Delhi: Modern Asian Study, 1974, Print.

4. Mukherjee, Alok. 2018 print. Sharankumar Limble: Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited Publisher.
5. Ahmed, K. G. (1984). Women's Role and the Freedom Movement' Occasional Paper. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
6. Andrews, C. F. (1930). Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas: Including Selections from His Writings (Vol. 10). Macmillan.
7. Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1989). Theory at the Crossroads: Indigenous Theory and Post-colonial Reading. The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures. London: Routledge.
8. Beya, B. (2012). Abdennebi. Mimicry, Ambivalence and Hybridity. Postcolonial Studies at Emory.
9. Bhabha, H. K. (1994). The Location of Culture London: Routledge.
10. Huddart, D. (2005). Homi K. Bhabha. Psychology Press.
11. Kanthapura(1938). New Delhi : Orient Paperbacks, 1970.
12. Kishwar, M. (1985). Gandhi on women. Economic and Political Weekly, 1691-1702.
13. Kumar, P. K. (2018). Images of India in the select novels of Salman Rushdie.
14. Mohanty, C. T., Russo, A., & Torres, L. (Eds.). (1991). Third world women and the politics of feminism. Indiana University Press.
15. Nair, M., Cole, J., & Dale, H. (1993). Mira Nair. Calling the Shots: Profiles of Women Parsons, J. B., & Harding, K. J. (2011). Post Colonial Theory and Action Research. Online Submission, 2(2), 1-6.