



10.5281/zenodo.7998193

Vol. 06 Issue 06 June - 2023

Manuscript ID: #0874

GENDERED EMOTIONALITY: ASPECTS OF POWER, GENDER AND EMOTION AS IN *RICH LIKE US* AND *WILD SWANS*

Dr. Syndhya. J, *Assistant Professor*, St. Mary's Centenary Degree College, Secunderabad
 Dr. Stars Jasmine, *Assistant Professor (Retd.)*, Anna University, Chennai

Corresponding Email: syndhyaj@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Despite the extensive research on Emotion and Emotional Intelligence, little is known about the social perspective of gendered emotionality. Though plenty of research has been conducted, which studies the emotional differences between men and women, the role of emotional regulation of the genders in societal integrity is hardly studied. Thus, fore-grounded in the emotion and gender theories, this paper derives an overall image from the literature that discusses the possibility of rational gender emotions in acquiring an integrated individual self. Rediscovering some of the stereotyped perspective of emotion expressions with respect to gender, the paper is further an examination of the analysis and critique of the characters from the novels 'Rich Like Us' by Nayantara Sahgal and 'Wild Swans' by Jung Chang. As the stories add nuance to our understanding of an experience during a political crisis, the violence at the nations' yields to the complicated self of the public and their social relationships. To illustrate their emotional function, the paper studies six characters from the novels in specific, analysing the stronger gender emotions. The unconscious dimensions of felt emotional experience thereby determine if the 'weaker sex' is weak or strong in establishing an integrated self and society.

KEY WORDS

Emotion regulation; gendered emotional differences; gender stereotypes.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License.

Introduction

'Emotion', once considered an exclusively psychological and private phenomenon, is now perceived as a derivative of the social world comprising the formal, power-based 'agonic' society and the informal, communal social relationships-based 'hedonic' society. Emotions become the linking factor between these public and private domains (TenHouten, 2007). Etymologically it means 'to move' or to 'stir up', and thus has the propensity to 'establish, maintain or disrupt a relationship with the environment' (Frijda, 1987, p.71). According to Sara Ahmed (2004), emotions are that which work to shape individuals and collective bodies, with surfaces and boundaries, aligning them into families and nations. Thus, as a principle of movement, emotions sustain or disrupt relationships, adapting and coping to the social situations that life presents. Aristotle (383-323 BC) who understood this idea of emotion, as having a social dimension, thereby comprehended a person's emotional experience as a frame-work for the individual's world outlook. Thus as an adaptive reaction to social relationships, emotion signals that a social situation demands attention and a state of emotional disequilibrium results in unhappiness and a whole range of disorders (TenHouten, 2007). This necessitates the understanding and control of emotions for a better human behaviour and society. But in what way is the emotional integrity of a person attained or attainable? 'Emotions' involve actions and movements. So when there is a crisis in society, how is the emotional integrity of a person disturbed? Further, men and women being an integral part of society, with significant biological and gender differences and experiences, express and adapt to various situations differently. So how integrity and harmony in a society are sustained through the ambivalent gender relations?

Theoretical framework of the study

This study is fore grounded in theories of two specific disciplines namely, the Theories of Emotion and Gender Studies. Specifically, they are the Affect theory and the Affect-Spectrum theory drawn from the former and the Evolutionary/ Cultural theory and the Social Role theory from the latter. These theories will lead to the discussion with respect to the purpose of the study and later they are analysed with respect to the literary novels taken as samples of study.

Theories of Emotion Affect Theory

According to Strasser (1970), emotions are eruptive and expressive in responding to a situation in which one's vital needs are prone to be at stake. "How does this eruptive emotion emerge?"

Baruch Spinoza (1632-77), who defines emotion as having a propensity to increase or decrease the power of action of an individual, says that some bodies (individuals) have the potential to 'affect' other bodies and others to be acted upon. This 'affect' usually captured *in-between* the bodies, are confined *within* the bodies as they encounter various affective situations, according to Brain Massumi (1996). The 'impersonal intensity' affect emerging as a transcendent 'qualified intensity' becomes 'personal' *emotion*.

Spinoza believed that affect arises from the interaction between the individual and the external world. He argued that we are constantly bombarded by external stimuli that affect our bodies and minds. Some of these stimuli increase our power to act, while others decrease it. The way we respond to these stimuli determines our affective states.

Spinoza also believed that affect is contagious. He argued that our affective states can be transmitted to others, and that we can be affected by the affective states of others. This is why emotions can be so powerful and why they can spread quickly through a group of people. In Spinoza's view, the goal of

human existence is to increase our power to act. This means that we should strive to increase our positive affective states and decrease our negative ones. Spinoza believed that this could be achieved through rational understanding and self-mastery. By understanding the causes of our affective states, we can learn to control them and increase our power to act in the world.

However, an individual is never independent of the society, which Sara Ahmed (2004) explains through 'Inside Out and Outside In Model' of emotions. Her theory is that, when an individual has a feeling or emotion, with the nature of moving in or out it moves outwards from the individual's inside towards others (Inside Out Model). In the same way, in case of crowd-psychology, the collective group becomes the individual from which the emotion reaches/affects the inside of a person (Outside In Model). This proves the above mentioned definition of 'emotion' as an adaptation to the situations and problems of life.

The 'Inside Out' aspect of the model refers to the idea that emotions are experienced and expressed by individuals from their own subjective perspectives. In other words, emotions are felt 'from the inside out', and they reflect the individual's personal experiences, desires, and beliefs. The 'Outside In' aspect of the model refers to the ways in which social and cultural contexts shape emotions. This includes the cultural norms, expectations, and values that influence how emotions are understood and expressed in different social settings.

Ahmed argues that emotions are not simply individual experiences, but are shaped by larger social and cultural forces. For example, cultural norms around gender can influence how individuals express emotions such as anger or sadness. Women may be socialized to express sadness more openly than anger, while men may be socialized to express anger more openly than sadness. The 'Inside Out and Outside In' model emphasizes the importance of considering both individual experiences and social contexts when understanding emotions. It suggests that emotions are not just personal experiences, but are shaped by the larger social and cultural world in which we live.

Overall, Ahmed's model highlights the complexity of emotions and the need to understand them in relation to the social and cultural contexts in which they are experienced and expressed. Further, as Collins (1990) claims, emotion becomes that which 'holds or binds the social body together'. Human beings dependent on bonding and relationships, 'personal' human emotions thus become socially specific and culturally diverse.

Affect-Spectrum Theory

Emotion, as discussed above, is usually eruptive, without rationality within and so destructive. Hence understanding and controlling emotions is necessary for an integrated self. Further, emotions being the linking factor connect the agonistic and the hedonic society. The Affect-Spectrum theory thus proposes reorganisation of emotions with rational thought towards the control of one's behaviour through a functional integration of emotion and cognition in both agonistic and hedonic societies (TenHouten, 2007).

In other words, the theory suggests that by understanding emotions as existing on a spectrum, and by recognizing the ways in which emotions are shaped by individual experiences and social and cultural factors, individuals can gain greater control over their behaviour.

The theory proposes that by integrating rational thought with emotions, individuals can make more informed and intentional choices about how they express and respond to emotions. This functional integration of emotion and cognition can be useful in both agonistic (competitive) and hedonic (pleasure-seeking) societies, as it allows individuals to better navigate social contexts and achieve their goals. In essence, the Affect-Spectrum Theory encourages individuals to view emotions as complex and dynamic experiences that can be understood and managed through intentional, rational thought. This can help individuals to cultivate emotional intelligence and better regulate their emotional responses in different situations.

According to Affect-Spectrum theory, a positive social experience in an 'authority-ranked social relations' gives rise to emotions like anger, anticipation and aggression. Whereas, in a hedonic society with 'equality-matched and communal social relationships' arises natural emotions of intimacy like acceptance, joy and love. Human life includes involvement of both power relations and intimate relationships. So a rational thought without consideration of others and regulation of self-interest (through emotions like love and acceptance) disrupts social order and commitment to collective goals (Robert Frank, 1988). Hence integration of the emotions of hedonic society into agonistic society is what maintains the order in society. This clearly implies that only through an integrated self (i.e., an individual with one's emotions regulated) can an integrated society be evolved. But how is an integrated self attained? What is to be integrated into a self to gain control over the eruptive emotion? The Affect-Spectrum Theory suggests that an integrated self, which involves regulating one's emotions through rational thought, is necessary for an integrated society, but the process of attaining this integration is not specified by the theory.

Affect-Spectrum theory further claims that an individual's early personal experience determines how s/he faces the larger social world. In particular, the review evidence of Burk and Burkhart (2003) reveals that an individual exposed to negative or problematic social situations fails to develop emotions required for self-regulation and self-control, while an individual with positive personal experience is well-equipped to face the larger world (TenHouten, 2007). Here, the problematic experience is that of the quality of family relationships rather than of the society. That is, with poor parent/child relationships or negative social relationships with those 'who are supposed to be positive role-models' arises 'enormous stress', giving rise to individuals with 'character structure of hostile intentions' (TenHouten, 2007). This becomes the reason for violence in society as individuals turn to be vengeful and revenge-seeking misanthropes, due to the injury inflicted by the power of others (explained in Affect Theory). Thus, a problematic social situation disintegrates an emotional self, eventually bringing in violence into the society disrupting the societal peace and harmony. During a crisis, if an individual is able to maintain a balance within the emotional self, then the societal peace can also be sustained. However, who can attain this emotional integrity in a society which comprises both men and women who are in every means two different species. With the biological differences and socio-cultural stereotypes men and women perceive and experience life situations differently, which necessitates the study of gender.

Theories of Gender Studies

Evolutionary Approach and Cultural Approach

'Gender', completely different from biological 'sex', is viewed as a social construction and as a product of cultural ideals by most cultural and social theorists. Cultural theorists like Martin and Ruble (2004) thereby considered gender socialisation as the process by which boys and girls learn masculine and feminine identities. However, the prescriptive and descriptive norms of gender have

originated from evolution according to Darwin's Evolutionary theory. Thus Darwinian Theory emphasises biologically based difference in sexes, which is not a mere physical characteristics but psychological traits and behaviours (Glick, 2008, p. 11). With biological differences related to pregnancy and childbirth, women had evolved to be nurturing mothers and caregivers while men had evolved to be competitive providers. Further, Darwin's Sexual Selection Theory explains the evolution of male dominance and female subordination as women due to selection pressures tend to select men of assertive and aggressive nature as their guard (Buss, 2003, 2005). This forces men to evolve themselves as violent and dominant providers and protectors within their intergroup, later resulting in violence against their female partners. According to Caporeal (2001), this nature becomes encoded into the genes of men as the information is passed on from generation to generation.

Social Role Theory

In addition to the evolutionary gender differences, the Social Structural approach describes the gender differences due to social roles and positions within intergroup relations of a society. Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987) being the most influential Social Structural theory of gender, thus posits the origin and content of gender stereotypes. With each society expecting and demanding individuals to exhibit specific traits and roles, within particular relationships/groups arise stereotypes, further reinforced by status differences. Thus the theory delineates that roles not only reinforce stereotypes about each gender, but also creates reality as individuals socialise to enact and adapt to the expected behaviours (Social Learning Theory- Mischel, 1966). This implies that provided different social roles, men and women could have exhibited different ideals about gender. However, as evolutionary theory explains, biological differences lay the foundation for gender social roles. Further, though Social role theory predicts the convergence of stereotyped roles, in case of men sharing the child-rearing role and women occupying positions demanding agentic nature, the stereotypes of men as chief providers and women as highly communal nurturers remain unchanged challenging the possibility of change. Gender expectations and prescriptions, thereby, create sex differences that seem to be natural (imbibed in the psyche of individuals) but which men and women don't possess initially. Change in gender roles, thus is resisted and hindered.

Gendered Emotions of Society

With the gender theories explaining gender differences and relations based on evolution, culture and societal roles, it is explicit that there exists an unequal power relation between the sexes which challenges change. Further, even the emotions are biased and gendered. The emotions experienced and expressed by women (fear, joy, happiness, sorrow, love) are looked down upon and men are stereotyped and expected to have a restricted emotionality. In a way, these gendering of emotions can be compared to that of agonistic and hedonic society mentioned in the affect-spectrum theory. The table below explains the characteristics of agonistic and hedonic society in accordance with the emotional nature of each gender. According to TenHouten in his book *A General Theory of Emotions and Social Life*, the prevalent emotions in a power-based society is anger and aggression which gender theories determine as the stereotyped emotionality of men. In the same way, hedonic society exalts love as the base for communal relationships which becomes the expected emotionality of women in a stereotyped society. However, women being naturally kind and caring are imbued with the qualities of love and acceptance which further represent the emotional nature of hedonic society.

Table 1.

As discussed earlier in the Affect Spectrum theory, an integrated society can be achieved only through the integration of the emotions of both hedonic and agonistic society. Without positive communal social

relationships, the power relations in the society can hardly be sustained. In line with that, to attain ‘an integrated self’ means the combination of emotions of communal relationships even into power relations, which implies that an emotion of love and consideration for others within a family could help an individual sustain his/her relationship with the social world. In addition, women being biologically different and prone to physical pain and emotional changes during childbirth, are more composed and integrated during a negative or problematic social situation than men. Further being the vehicles of love and often being unjustly treated, women tend to show anger slower than men during an unjust or problematic social crisis, thus hindering eruptive violent emotions within an intergroup relationship. This paper thus proposes the superiority of women’s emotional regulation during a socio-political crisis by analyzing the literary novels from two different socio-cultural backgrounds.

Samples

The neighboring countries India and China, had shared various cross-cultural histories and ideologies for centuries, and had undergone catalytic events like Freedom Struggle and Emergency in India and Cultural Revolution in China. The novels taken for the study, as the representation of life during these socio-political changes written by writers who lived through those periods, are the representative samples of the societies. This ethnographic study employs a qualitative research method involving the empirical study of the novels ‘Rich Like Us’ written by Nayantara Sahgal and ‘Wild Swans’ Jung Chang. Thus Sahgal’s ‘Rich Like Us’ focuses on the Indian Emergency (1975-77), a traumatic period when democracy was challenged as the rule of law and overthrown in the name of social change and modernization. Similarly, Chang’s ‘Wild Swans’ effortlessly weaves the story of ‘three daughters of China’, who lived through the chaotic period of changing political ideologies and governments as the People’s Republic of China was established through the Cultural Revolution(1966-76). Taking three women characters namely, Sonali, Rose and Mona from ‘Rich Like Us’ and the three generations of Chang’s family from ‘Wild Swans’ as samples, the paper thus studies their adaptive reactions towards these socio-political changes.

Methodology

Art, being the emotional discourse of daily encounters that occur through unconscious communication, prevails as a higher form of emotional expression and emotional message of our lives. As Deleuze (1925-95) puts forth, art has the potential to cut out chaotic encounters, to capture the affect with the addition of descriptive states of those affects. Initially analyzing the emotions of individuals, both men and women in general, the paper studies the relationship between an individual and his/her society to find out the im/possibility of emotional integrity in an (dis) integrated society. Then the focus is on the emotionality of women, to prove that women attain an integrated self, even during a problematic situation, more easily than men, who seem to struggle with their restricted stereotyped emotionality.

Analysis and discussion of the novel characters

As explained earlier, ‘emotions’ are that which bind individuals into families and societies, further linking the private and public domains of the society. The novels represent the social world, narrates about the public political world and individual’s private family relations. As a part of the family, characters live in the society, confined by the socio-political norms. In the novel ‘Rich Like Us’, characters like Sonali, Rose and Mona are part of such a society. Mona confines and restricts herself to the house-hold roles of the patriarchal society and Rose (a foreigner) changes her lifestyle according to Ram’s wish (Mona’s husband and her lover), while Sonali’s attitude towards marriage and women is considered queer. Though the women in the novel are never outspoken or self-

conscious about their emotions, it cannot be completely forgotten. All the women, including Nishi and Kiran are unconsciously stuck to the stereotypes, exhibiting the roles expected by their society. Thus their gender roles and the expression of their emotions are intertwined, such that when Sonali tries to be slightly different holding on to being an IAS officer rather than getting married, she is shunned by women themselves. In the same way, even though Rose loves Ram and leaves her home in England to be with him, she never marries him or agrees to Ram's desire. She leads a lonely life (not literally) in the alien land constantly questioning the persisting cultural and religious norms with gender inequality. Mona's hatred toward Rose transforms into love as Rose saves her from the fire. Mona later starts sympathizing for the death of Rose's parents, though they had been rivals sharing Ram. This explains the Affect Theory where feelings move and get captured forming emotions.

In the novel 'Wild Swans', the three generations of women exhibit similar traits of characteristics even when the stereotypes were much stronger against Chinese women. Though Chang's grandmother was forced to marry a warlord and remain a concubine, she escaped to save her daughter and lived to tell the tale. With the dramatic changes in the political reign in China, the psychological trauma became inexplicable. But the three generations of women display remarkable strength of both body and character, even with the strongest bends under the onslaught of the Cultural Revolution. Jung Chang's grandmother even on her death bed attributed her decline to a denunciation meeting against her, describing the ordeal in great detail. However, what she described was mere delusion, and the denunciation meeting had never taken place. Though the next generations of women were comparatively free in the public domain, Chang's mother experienced pain and hardships from the hands of her father. Being loyal to the Communist Party, Chang's father hardly showed love or compassion towards his wife or children. During the political crisis, even when he enjoyed status and power under the political rule, he hardly favored his wife (who was next to his cadre) which led to the loss of her child. However, Chang's mother on the other hand, showed her 'strength' when her family was totally shattered. During her husband's mental illness due to denunciation meetings, she stood for her husband and saved her children by all means.

In addition to these, emotions are not just of the family relationships, but they maintain or disrupt relationships between the communal and the social world. For instance, in the novels the socio-political world is maintained through the emotions. Each nation with separate territory, the citizens experience emotions of fear, surprise and anticipation as the territoriality disrupts. Politicians make use of this fear and promise protection and security from the affecting others. In case of a family, the role of the protecting politician is taken up by the male protector as the female nurturer demands the protection of the offspring. Eventually this demand of protection presents a dominant leader and a male in both agonistic and hedonic society. But as Affect spectrum theory explains, an individual's outlook of the world depends on his/her past experience, especially the quality of their family relationship. So with a poor quality of family relationship and a lonely or abusive childhood, the individual turns out to be a violent, self-centered and a misanthropic person. In the case of such leaders (in a society or a family), he/she strives for selfish gain instead of collective cause. In both the novels, the agonistic society represents such a circumstance. In 'Rich Like Us', Sahgal being the first cousin of Indira Gandhi, tells about Indira Gandhi's Emergency Period, which might have resulted because of her thirst for power. Similarly in the novel 'Wild Swans', Chang tells about the reign of Mao, whose bitter past, would have been the reason behind the Cultural Revolution which killed millions of people in the name of maintaining law and establishing the People's Republic of China. But what happens if rationality integrates with such emotionality? For example, in the case of Sonali and Rose, though they had a problematic past, they never turned vengeful or bitter. Even when Sonali had been demoted and had no future during the Emergency, Sonali was helping out Rose. On the

other hand, Rose had been feeding and saving the helpless beggar from the laws (like sterilization) during Emergency. Similarly, Chang's grandmother and mother saw through the problems, establishing a loving relationship which sustained their lives and families during the destructive Cultural Revolution.

Expression and experience of emotion based on gender, Dev in 'Rich Like Us' and Chang's father in 'Wild Swans' are examples in contrast to the women characters from both the novels. However, men experience and exhibit emotions based on the restricted emotionality prescribed by the society. Dev's dominance over Nishi and the heartless attitude of Chang's father towards his wife shows that handling a problematic situation is more traumatic for men. When Ram's company is taken over by Dev, after Ram's illness, during the Emergency Period, all Dev does is burden his workers with workload and pay them less, thereby bringing an end to his father's hard-earned name and fame. Similarly Chang's father mentally breaks down when he realizes that the institution in which he had been rooted and which he had believed for years was false. In both the cases, the women characters, Nishi and Chang's mother, exhibit emotional integrity and efficiently manage the problematic situations. They establish a loving relationship within their circle which helps them sustain through the problem. This circle is not just confined within the family. Nishi becomes sympathetic towards her workers and the love and care of Chang's mother binds her family and revives her husband's health. In such a way, emotionally integrated women help in sustaining the integrity of not just their families but also work towards the construction of an integrated society.

Conclusion

No nation is devoid of political upheaval or a family of a catastrophe. Problematic situations are not just of the historical past or of a particular group but also of the present and inevitable in every relation. 'Emotions' as a result of adaptation to these negative situations are irrational resulting in rigid belief systems. As noted, the findings from the study emerge to prove that the absence of emotional equilibrium leads to disorder within self, leading to chaotic social relationships, disrupting integrity in a society. So with rational emotionality, personal integrity arises. Further, with gender stereotypes determining gender roles in each society, there is an inequality in emotional expression with respect to gender. In so far as gender emotion is concerned, the societal expectation is that women exhibit emotions of love and kindness as they are stereotyped to be the weaker sex. However, Gundrip (1961) asserts that "only the strong can love." Women are thus stronger emotionally than men who disintegrate easily during a crisis. Emotional integrity of women thereby facilitates better relationships within the family and society. Even the inequality in gender and the emotional expression has thus in a way established a pathway for attaining social peace and harmony. With rational emotions thus arises an integrated emotional self which is the base for an integrated society.

Recommendations

By and large, scholars discuss the inequality that exists in societies. This paper established that discrimination also prevails in the realm of emotional expression. However, what if there is gender equality in expression of emotions? What if men are also expected to show love instead of being aggressive and violent? With gender expectations in a society emanate the gender roles of femininity and masculinity. So if the societal expectation changes, the equality in gender emotionality may fabricate men with emotional serenity and thereby a finer society.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press.
- Aristotle. (Ed.) (1984). *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. J Barnes. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Burk, L.R. & Burkhart, B.R. (2003). Disorganized attachment as a diathesis for sexual deviance developmental experience and the motivation for sexual offending. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 8, 487-511.
- Buss, D.M. (Ed.) (2003). *Evolutionary psychology: The new science of the mind*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Buss, D.M. (2005). *The murderer next door: Why the mind is designed to kill*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Caporeal, L.R. (2001). Evolutionary psychology: Toward a unifying theory and hybrid science. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 607–628.
- Chang, J. (1992). *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*. New York: Anchor.
- Collins, R. (1990). Stratification, Emotional Energy and the Transient Emotions. In T. Kemper (Ed.), *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions* (pp. 27-67). New York: Sunny Press.
- Eagly, A.H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social role interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Frank, R.H. (1988). *Passions within Reason: The Strategic Role of the Emotions*. New York: W.W.Norton.
- Frijda, H. N. (1987). *The Emotions*. New York: Cambridge UP.
- Martin, C.L., & Ruble, D. (2004). Children's Search for Gender Cues: Cognitive Perspectives on Gender Development. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13, 67–70.
- Massumi, B. (Ed.) (1996). *The Autonomy of Affect. Deleuze: A Critical Reader*. P Patton. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Mischel, W. (1966). A social learning view of sex differences in behavior. In E.E. Maccoby (Ed.), *The development of sex differences* (pp. 56–81). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press,
- Rudman, L.A., & Glick, P. (2008). *The Social Psychology of Gender: How Power and Intimacy Shape Gender Relations*. New York: Guilford.
- Saghal, N. (1985). *Rich Like Us*. New York: New Directions.
- Spinoza, B. (1959). *Spinoza's Ethics: And on the Correction of the Understanding*, trans. A.Boyle, London : Everyman's Library.
- Strasser, S. (1970). Feeling as a basis of knowing and recognizing the other as an ego. In M.B. Arnold (Ed.), *Feelings and Emotions: The Loyola Symposium* (pp.291-306), New York: Academic Press.
- TenHouten, D.W. (2007). *A General Theory of Emotions and Social Life*. New York: Routledge.

Table 1.

Agonic Society	Anger Anticipation Aggression	Men	Anger Aggression Violence
Power-Based Authority-Ranked		Dominant Provider	
Hedonic Society	Acceptance Joy Love	Women	Kindness Love Vulnerable
Equality-Matched Communal Relationships		Submissive Nurturer	