

HOW FAR WILL SHE GO:
THEORISING FEMALE RAGE IN “IRON WIDOW” BY XIRAN
JAY ZHAO AND “THE JASMINE THRONE” BY TASHA SURI

Sonal Dutt¹, Parul Mishra²

1. PhD. School of Liberal Arts (SoLA), GD Goenka University, Gurgaon, INDIA
sonaldutt204@gmail.com

2. Assoc. Prof. School of Liberal Arts (SoLA), GD Goenka University, Gurgaon,
INDIA

Abstract: Rage is as genuine an emotion as happiness or sadness; ideally, one would not have to put one's anger through a trial. However, the negative connotations around the word ‘rage’ make it difficult to be perceived without any bias. To make matters worse, *female rage*, which arises in response to patriarchal oppression, has a history of being infantilised or fetishised in popular culture. Angry women were shown as unhinged beings who relish making a mockery of morality and societal conventions. However, contemporary feminist writers are trying to change this perception. Their works, which vary in genre, strive to illustrate that this rage is a warranted response to the trauma of oppression that women face throughout their lives. They argue that it has a purpose, a moral code, and conviction, and can bring about social change. This paper illustrates how contemporary speculative fiction works, particularly the select texts of Xiran Jay Zhao (*Iron Widow*, 2021) and Tasha Suri (*The Jasmine Throne*, 2021), portray female rage; how it manifested and what fuelled it; and what price the protagonists paid for their rage. It then uses Judith Butler's gender theory to examine how putting a limit on this rage is just another form of patriarchal control.

Keywords: female rage, patriarchy, feminism, gender theory, trauma, speculative fiction

INTRODUCTION

Human emotions are not bound by reason. A person's reaction to the outside stimulus, be it human or material, is involuntary at best. However, the emotion most out of the voluntary control of a human

is anger. The unfortunate part is that no matter what provoked it, a person's anger is liable to be put through a trial of validity. Even if that does not happen, the disparity between how a man's rage and a woman's rage are treated is astounding. A man's rage is a force to be reckoned with. It is just, purposeful, and almost ethereal. His rage becomes this entity that demands to be seen and felt by everyone around him, and no one thinks to blame him for not containing it. Homer's ancient Greek epic poem *Iliad* (c. 8th century BC) detailed how heroic Achilles' wrath was, which sparked over an attack on his honour as well as the murder of his friend, Patroclus. The destruction and death caused by the Greek warrior's action are rarely ever under scrutiny for being wrong. *Hamlet* (c. 1599), one of the greatest tragedies written by Shakespeare, detailed how a man's wrath could lead to his destruction. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) is a widely celebrated realist play about the anger of a working-class man. Bret Easton Ellis' novel *American Psycho* (1991), which was also adapted into a movie, has become a cult classic amongst fans of horror and thrillers despite the protagonist being a vicious serial killer. *The Broken Empire Trilogy* (2011-2013) by Mark Lawrence is one of the most celebrated fantasy series, wherein the major themes across the storyline are wrath and vengeance that the male protagonist exacts on the people who wronged him in the past. Rage itself is thought to be a very masculine trait that enhances and validates a man's virility.

But why is rage, or any other emotion, ascribed a gender? American philosopher Judith Butler, in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), argues that gender is a socially constructed concept wherein certain roles, responsibilities, emotions, *etc.*, are imposed upon an individual. These attributes are put in place to ensure that the individual conforms to societal norms. A person's behaviour is considered gender-normative if it aligns with the set norms of their gender. Historically, women are taught to be soft-spoken, meek, and submissive, while men are encouraged to be brave, aggressive, and bold. There are set gender roles that society encourages, sometimes even forces its members to follow. These constraints are often

meant to control the behaviour of the people; to bind them to the gender binary. This is one of the reasons why children are taught gender roles from their formative years through language, culture, and tradition - boys are spurred on to be assertive while girls are instructed to be gentle. Even languages confine women to this otherness, which ostracises them from male spaces:

(...) the binary structuration of language produces its valuations through a sexualizing economy that casts 'woman' as improper - the primordial ground against which the male subject is defined. Consequently, woman is aligned with 'otherness', 'the body', 'irrationality' and 'the animal', and all of these concepts seem *naturally* to conjure one another. (Kirby 2007, 24)

Women have been called the 'other sex' or the alien, where they are mocked as difficult to understand and impossible to please. The man is the reasonable one who must suffer through the irrationality of women. These polarising notions are often encouraged by society as a way of 'fitting in' in a binary world. Gender roles also dictate an individual's behaviour and emotions, and how society responds to them. Dictating how to feel and who gets to feel, thus, becomes another form of societal control where people are forced to stay boxed into normative behaviour.

Contemporary feminist writers are always looking for ways to challenge these outdated societal norms. While every story is not meant to be a social commentary, they do take on the absurdities of gender politics to liberate the sensibilities of their audience. There is a growing trend amongst these writers to explore as well as test the boundaries of female rage. With angry women the likes of Jennifer (*Jennifer's Body*, 2009), Offred (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 2017), Cassie (*Promising Young Women*, 2020) taking over films and television; songs about a woman's anger like Beyonce's *Hold Up* (2016) and *Labour* (2023) by Paris Paloma, the literary world is soon catching up.

The idea of a wrathful woman is not new, per se, but its understanding and significance are going through a recent revolution. Earlier female characters' anger was infantilised and

mocked way more than their male counterparts. Even the existing research focused on characters that were created for the male gaze. While they explored the reasons for this rage, the conversations were still male-centric and focused on quantifying female rage. It is imperative to perceive a woman's rage through the female gaze, where the focus is not on the intensity or validity of her anger but rather on the reasons and circumstances. This will enable a better understanding of the gravity of a woman's daily struggles. This research aims to explore feminine rage from a feminist perspective through select works, as well as examine the endeavour of patriarchy to contain this rage. The paper first discusses the bias against female rage and how it is changing. It then goes on to understand and explore this rage in both texts while also analysing how gender roles and patriarchal oppression try to force these women back into set norms.

Gender and gender roles play a significant part in how differently rage is perceived in men and women. According to Butler, gender is a social construct that has no ties to the material body. In her book, she talks extensively about how gender stems from repeated cultural and social practices. This paper holds this true and argues that this social practice of gender is responsible for creating and prescribing submissive gender roles for women while placing men at the social hierarchy. The disregard for women's anger and the subsequent need to contain it are also a form of patriarchal control. In this paper, two contemporary speculative fiction novels, *Iron Widow* and *The Jasmine Throne*, will be analysed through this understanding of Judith Butler's gender theory in relation to the texts and with particular attention to the exploration of the main female characters, Wu Zetian, Malini and Priya and their rage. By bringing together gender theory and speculative fiction, this research makes contributions towards two angles. First, it contextualises and familiarises female rage in a fantastical setting to better understand the pervasiveness of gender disparity. Second, it illustrates that gender-normative behaviours are encouraged by society as a means of control.

LET HER RAGE

A woman's rage is treated vastly differently in comparison to men. Women have been taught forever to have tight control over their emotions and thoughts. A single misstep in this practice results in them being labelled as emotional, hysterical, or even unstable. The portrayal of angry women in popular culture has been tiring. They have been infantilised, villainised, and even fetishised to a certain degree. The ancient Greek tragedy play *Medea* (431 BC) by Euripides follows the female protagonist as she exacts revenge on her unfaithful husband through some very extreme measures. Medea's anger at her husband was real, but the consequences were grossly exaggerated and tragic. Bertha Mason, the madwoman in the attic or Mr Rochester's wife, in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), is described as an unhinged woman who lashes out against her husband and Jane, the woman he loves. She is portrayed as a villainess who almost ruined her husband's life with her drastic actions. *Carrie* (1974) is a horror novel by Stephen King that follows the story of a girl with telekinetic powers who finally rages against her bullies, where she kills them and dying a violent death herself.

The idea of an angry woman, thus, sits very uncomfortable with society. It has created a certain hostility around how women feel anger, giving birth to even more prejudices and bigotry. Female rage is the rage that manifests "... particularly in relation to sexual violence, but also in relation to other forms of sexism, racism and injustice" (Orgad and Gill 2019, 596). Women have always been considered the 'weaker sex', which has resulted in a grave power imbalance between the sexes. They are seen as helpless creatures who are always in need of rescue or guidance. Not only men but women are also equal perpetrators of discrimination against other women; competition at work, jealousy in daily life, regressive mentality, *etc.*, are some factors that pit women against women. The constant oppression of society, the microaggressions at every turn, and the blatant disrespect faced by women every day, in every facet of their lives, are bound to create several angry women to demand

that things change. However, expressing this anger has some polarising consequences for women. The ‘angry Black woman’ is, perhaps, one of the most prevalent stereotypes in American culture. It is a racially motivated misbelief that Black women are inherently aggressive and ill-tempered. This has very real repercussions for these women in their daily lives as well as the workplace, as people are inclined to assume that a Black woman being angry has more to do with her nature and personality rather than the situation (Motro et al. 2022). Other such harmful stereotypes include the ‘ice queen’, where a woman in power is usually considered to be heartless; some stereotypes also reduce angry women to conniving creatures without morals. These regressive portrayals of women in popular culture have only added to the negativity around the idea of female rage.

A defining moment in the efforts to change this perception came in the form of the #MeToo Movement. The phrase was first coined in 2006 by Tarana Burke, but gained serious traction in 2017 after the New York Times published an article detailing Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein’s horrific past of assaulting and abusing women in the film industry (Gordon 2023). Inspired by the actresses who spoke out against Harvey, many women from all over the world came together to speak out against their abusers. This movement became a global phenomenon that seemed to give a new direction to women’s rage. Coupled with that, contemporary feminist writers are creating stories of glorious female rage to encourage women to embrace their anger and relish it. Their works also aim to articulate that this anger that women feel is a justified response to the trauma of oppression that they have been experiencing throughout their entire lives. Angry women are shown resorting to violence, not because it is the easy way out, but because it is the only remaining way out. The argument here is that their actions are extreme because the situation, the abuse, or the violence they experienced is extreme; “(...) the oppressive conditions which women must endure as women offer a powerful narrative justification for the ‘spectacular action’ of their violence” (Lentz 1993, 378). However, this does not

mean that these stories are out to mock morality, nor are they aiming to dispose of ethics. For these contemporary writers, portraying violence through their female characters is just another means to realise liberation and empowerment (Balanescu 2022). The crime thriller novel *Gone Girl* (2012) by Gillian Flynn is the story of revenge, where a woman plans her kidnapping to get back at her cheating husband. *The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman is a science fiction novel where women discover they have immense electrical powers, which shift the entire dynamic of society. *Circe* (2018) by Madeline Miller is a retelling of the sorceress Circe in Greek mythology, whose rage shapes her destiny and identity. *The Queen of the Cicadas* (2021), a horror novel by V. Castro, is a haunting tale of a dead migrant worker who, along with the help of a goddess, vows to exact revenge on her killers while also defending those who call for aid. The story takes on themes like misogyny and racism, and how differently it affects women.

N.K. Jemisin's science fantasy novel *The Fifth Season* (2015) is a story of how women use their grief and rage to shape a better world and fight the shackles of brutal oppression. Such representations are a step forward in making people comfortable with the dynamics of female rage. These narratives also challenge the outdated gender norms where a woman must be meek, self-sacrificing, and ever-smiling to be likeable. Usually, female characters in such stories either are or grow to be outspoken, audacious, and even self-serving. Arya Stark's character from the hit fantasy book and television series *Game of Thrones* (1996) by George R.R. Martin starts as a defenceless little girl who witnesses the murder of her family, but goes on to become one of the deadliest assassins in the world, fuelled by her wrath and need for vengeance. Portraying narratives of angry women in mainstream media and literature is a sure way of getting people to be comfortable with the concept of rage. The more they see it, the more they will acknowledge it.

According to Butler, one important factor to consider while talking about the discourse around feminism is that the concept of a universal patriarchy is farcical. "The notion of a universal

patriarchy has been widely criticised in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists” (Butler 1999, 6). No person experiences oppression and exploitation in the same or equal way as others. The differences occur mostly due to the fact that different cultures, languages, and traditions differently affect the people who are a part of them. The context of culture thus becomes very intrinsic to the discussion of gender oppression. Western culture is poles apart from Asian or African cultures, and applying the same principles of feminism to them would be a gross misappropriation. There cannot be a coherent feminist theory without understanding the complexities that a person’s culture brings to their identity. Another principal reason that disproves the adequacy of a universal patriarchy is the reality that gender intersects with race, class, sexuality, gender identities outside of the binary, and other such social categories to create varying and complex systems of injustice. A White woman’s experience with patriarchy and bigotry would be completely different to that of a Black lesbian woman. Thus, this form of feminist theorising, in the broad spectrum of cultural complexities, is a futile exercise at best.

IRON WIDOW: A POWER STRUGGLE

The narration is set in the empire of Huaxia, a futuristic reimagination of Medieval China where Gods or the Heavenly Council aid humans to fight off the constant attacks from an alien species called the Hunduns. The civilisation survived annihilation and has been rebuilt since. Humans have built Chrysalises, giant fighting robots or mechas, that are piloted by young men. These men with high spirit pressures release qi that aids in steering the robots. Their co-pilots are called ‘concubines’ who are meant to support the men throughout the fights at the cost of their own lives; all of this is broadcast live throughout the nation. The young men are treated like celebrities adored by the public, while the young

women are just left to die. The protagonist, Wu Zetian, is a common girl who enlists as a concubine to avenge the death of her sister. She resents her family for selling first her sister and then her for the money. She pretends to be a docile girl and uses her beauty to get paired with Yang, the pilot who caused her sister's death. While piloting, their qi connects, and Zetian sees the evidence of his previous abuse against not only her sister but many other innocent girls. Overcome with hatred, she stabs Yang to death inside the Chrysalises. This was her very first act of rage, but in no manner was it senseless. Zetian did plan on killing Yang, but she still held out hope that he was just another innocent bystander who felt as helpless at the situation as she did. Her first words, as well as her demeanour after emerging victorious from the mecha show she is unrepentant about the violent nature of her act. It is evident from her words:

You've been living a dream for long enough!" I yell at the cameras between bursts of maniacal laughter, raising my arms. "Welcome to your nightmare! (Chapter 8)

Butler begins her book by discussing politics and representation; two troublesome notions intrinsically linked together. In feminist theory, it is imperative to bring together the subjects of feminism under a universal category – women. The aim is to seek representation for women in politics as well as in society. However, it is this same category that then tries to control them:

On the one hand, *representation* serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women. (Butler 1999, 3)

Just by being a 'subject', which must be regulated and represented by the law, a woman, unintentionally, becomes subjugated to the law and cannot be separated from it. It is this judicial structure that created the notions of what it means to be a woman, then regulates

the fact that these beliefs are upheld, and eventually exercises control over women and womanhood. Interestingly, this law actively tries to evade responsibility for having created the subject, that is, the ideals of womanhood, to further the narrative that these norms occur naturally and thus predate any law. This is done to ensure that the subject or woman cannot separate themselves from the law and forever be under its power. If by any fluke, a woman tries to break free from these constraints, she is labelled as an anomaly and must face the consequences of her rebellion. This often results in the woman being mocked, belittled or even ostracised from societal ranks. She is made an example of so that no one dares to follow in her steps and try to oppose the norms.

Society's need to dictate and constrain a woman and her emotions as a form of control is detailed in the selected text. After her first act of rage, Zetian is branded as 'Iron Widow'- meaning a girl who sacrifices her male partner to power up the mecha, is locked up in a dungeon, and is sentenced to pair up with another male pilot whose spirit pressure has killed every girl he has been paired with. The consequences of her rage come in the form of her being thrown into an even deadlier situation with no escape. Her freedom is taken away as she is considered a risk, and the authorities make sure that she can never overpower another boy ever again. They seek to control her 'power' to keep up the façade and make sure none of the other girls try to imitate her. They deliberately set her up for failure, knowing that it would end with her dying.

They can't fathom the idea that "some random girl" could be so powerful.
(Chapter 19)

A society makes use of the knowledge it has encompassed over generations to evaluate, disperse, and most importantly, regulate itself. It does that through 'discourse', which Butler talks about in her book. She refers to Michel Foucault's definition of the term: an intersection of power, knowledge, and relationships in a social system. Discourse forms intricate structures of cognitive understanding. Society shapes discourse into power by regulating

both the internal as well as external experiences of its citizens. The creation of the gender binary was one of the principal ways for society to exercise this power. It also enforces the idea that there are only two biologically determined sexes and that this process is natural and irrefutable. Forced into this binary, the subjects have no option but to conform to either one of the identities, male or female and live it as their truth. Butler maintains that there is a stark difference between sex and gender. Where sex is biologically rooted, gender is entirely a social and cultural construct that society uses to bind and control its subjects:

Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. The unity of the subject is thus already potentially contested by the distinction that permits of gender as a multiple interpretation of sex. (Butler 1999, 9)

Gender and gender roles, thus, become tools that aid society in maintaining its power. Historically, this has always worked against the interests of women. These socially created gender norms force women into subservient roles, placing them beneath men and their aspirations.

Similarly, the government of Huaxia uses gender norms to subjugate one-half of its population. After repeated battles in the Chrysalises, Zetian suspects that they are rigged against the concubines because a frightening majority of the girls never survive any of the battles. To find the truth, she resorts to torturing a high-ranking officer, who then confesses that the system is purposely outfitted to ensure the survival of the male pilots. He also admits that the girls who get tested before being paired up are just as likely as boys to have high spirit pressure. This is when Zetian realises the real treachery of the government. They have been lying for hundreds of years to protect their boys while readily condemning their girls to painful deaths. She argues that the only reason men in power have spent decades lying is because they are scared. Since they cannot

force women to respect them, they have forced them into submission. These lines aptly illustrate her argument:

How do you take the fight out of half the population and render them willing slaves? You tell them they're meant to do nothing but serve from the minute they're born. You tell them they're weak. You tell them they're prey. You tell them over and over, until it's the only truth they're capable of living. (Chapter 25)

The government and the army saw a way to subjugate women and keep them trapped in their subservient roles by literally killing them off. All the while, they projected onto the public that dying as a concubine is the greatest honour a woman can achieve in her life. They also awarded fat cash compensations to the families of dead concubines to ensure that they continued volunteering their daughters for this task. This cycle of abuse and oppression had rotted away the foundations of society. They were putting on a façade of an ideal society while actively killing the subjugated half of their population. Women were forced into choosing either dying in poverty or dying as wealthy concubines, which in actuality is no choice at all. It is all propaganda that has been fed to them for generations to keep them as slaves to the system:

Men want us so badly for our bodies, yet hate us so much for our minds. (Chapter 10)

Another way in which society ensures that its subjects are subservient, according to Butler, is by pitting them against each other. Society, with the use of language and epistemology, has created systems that further the interest of one specific group, that is, men. As a result, women who do not share these interests have to fight constantly to get their interests recognised by society. This forms a grave power imbalance between men and women. The society then uses this power struggle to serve its interests, may it be political, cultural, or monetary:

The language of appropriation, instrumentality, and distanciation germane to the epistemological mode also belong to a strategy of domination that pits the

“I” against an “Other” and, once that separation is effected, creates an artificial set of questions about the knowability and recoverability of that Other. (Butler 1999, 183)

Once these clear distinctions are established, society then begins to question even the existence and legitimacy of the Other, that is, women. These questions are created in a bid to discredit the experiences and realities of women. Not just men and women, this distinction between the I and the Other can also be seen between races, classes, and other such social categories. The aim of a society for creating these differences remains the same: power and control.

THE JASMINE THRONE: RAGE BECOMES HER

The narration is set in a fictional country called Ahiranya, modelled on India. It was once a free country where the Gods had granted terrible powers to the temple elders, but it has now been subjugated by the Parijatdvipa empire. The empire came into being when three women, known as the mothers of flame, chose to sacrifice themselves in the holy fire. This helped some of the Parijatdvipans to gain fire powers, and they successfully drove off the Gods from Ahiranya. It is believed that almost all the original inhabitants of the country have been purged. The rule has continued for generations while its people have only suffered. The king and his officials enjoy obscene wealth, but the country and its people are poor and disease-ridden. The first protagonist is Priya, who is a servant in the regent's palace in the city of Hiranaprastha. She is secretly one of the few surviving temple children of the sacred Gods who conquered Hirana's deathless waters and gained some powers in return. Priya does not remember anything about her life as a child. The second protagonist is the princess of Parijatdvipa, Malini, who has been imprisoned by her emperor brother. He originally sentenced her to self-immolate, but she did not accept that decree and was thus sentenced to a life of solitude

and repentance in Hirana. Her keeper, Lady Pramila, is a cruel woman who is slowly poisoning the princess to death. Priya and Malini's paths cross when the latter arrives at the regent's palace. Priya is hiding her true identity and her powers as she leads a helpless and lowly servant life.

Butler criticises theorists who have categorised gender, and thus gender roles, as a relative concept rather than an individual attribute. She denies the concept that the 'feminine' only exists in relation to or because of the 'masculine'. If a woman's identity is to be conformed only through that of a man in and around her life, then that negates her singular experiences and struggles. A person's gender influences their social experiences, which in turn shapes their identity; "It would be wrong to think that the discussion of 'identity' ought to proceed before a discussion of gender identity." (Butler 1999, 22)

For Priya and Malini, their gendered experiences shape their wrath and thus their identity. Priya is angry at her circumstances, at the emperor's cruelty and somewhere even at the Gods who so readily abandoned her and her people. On the other hand, Malini's fury stems from her brother's inhuman betrayal as well as her inability to defend herself from her keeper's bid to kill her. She has been left alone to fend for herself. Their realities and struggles have shaped them into the women they are: wrathful and grief-stricken.

They were stealing her mind from her. They had denied her human company. She had nothing but herself. Nothing but the rage and grief that pulsed in her heart. (Chapter 4)

The intersection of gender with other social categories ensures that there cannot be a singular shared gendered experience. This means that the experiences of women with oppression and bigotry vary when their gender overlaps with social factors such as race, class, sexuality, *etc.* This need to unite women under a category or an ideal erases the influence these social factors have on the life of a person; "the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of

cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of “women” are constructed” (Butler 1999, 19). Society tries to bind women under a universal category with such rigid, pre-determined experiences as a way to exercise better and total control. Creating an ideal of a woman and ensuring that all the other women follow and voluntarily participate in it is just another way to undermine the agency of women.

Both Malini and Priya are constantly forced by the people around them to conform to the societal idea of a ‘woman’. The protagonists are constantly made aware of their flaws, their faults, and their shortcomings at every turn. Their failings are attributed to them being women, or rather, uncouth women. Priya is considered undesirable because of her low societal status and her unrefined manners. She is a maidservant who will forever remain as such. Malini, on the other hand, is despised because she went against her brother and declined to accept his royal decree. In a way, she went against God's will. To instil a sense of responsibility in these wayward women, they are constantly reminded and taught about the sacrifices of women who came before them, especially the tales of the mothers. Malini's keeper has a routine of reciting these tales day in and day out in hopes that she realises her sins and repents by choosing to immolate herself in the same vein as the mothers of flame. A woman who has sinned rebelling society can only atone by sacrificing her life. Forcing such primitive and violent ideals on the protagonists is a sure way to ensure their subjugation:

(...) my brother wants me to be pure and honourable like them. Because he thinks the only way a woman can truly serve the empire, the only way a woman can be good, is through the sacrifice of her life. (Chapter 14)

Butler maintains that gender is performative. By this, she means that gender is a process of patterns and repetitions of language and action. For Butler, gender resides in a human's repeated words and actions, which are performed out of free will. Further, gender is not just an act that a person puts up; instead, it becomes their

identity through this process. However, this ritualised repetition of gender, especially when performed as per societal norms, creates a false narrative of it being fixed and legitimate (Allen 2023). This leads to the creation of oppressive structures of power that force, upon men and women, this socially approved performance of gender binaries; how men should behave, how women should speak, what emotions to feel, the right way to perform their gender, *etc.* Society uses gender norms to isolate both men and women as a way of effectively exercising more power and control over them. Even within the same gender, it tries to create a hierarchy which would further create more power imbalance.

However, for Priya and Malini, their differences give them the strength to overcome their adversities. Despite being a mere servant, Priya has a kind and soft heart. She goes out of her way to help local children battling diseases, poverty, and hunger; her means might be limited, but it is in her nature to help those in need. She is hiding her secret and holds immense power, but she has never once acted rationally or used her powers for her own gain. Her grief and rage over the loss shaped her into a kind person who has her own goals, but she also wishes to aid those who are weaker than her. Whatever she endured became her strength, which eventually helped her realise her true power. Malini, on the other hand, is ruthless and a master manipulator. She figured out Priya's secret and did not hesitate to use that weakness to her advantage. She acts weak and despondent, but for her, it is a defence mechanism. The abuse she experienced at the hands of her brother shaped her into a woman who uses her mental prowess to exact her wrath:

She learned that day to turn to a carapace of meekness rather than showing the true mettle of her fury. (Chapter 25)

Drugged and isolated, she patiently waits for the day she can exact her revenge. Her wrath will only vanish after she kills her brother and takes back the throne. Both these women form a kinship

through their suffering. Their goals, coincidentally, are the same: exact vengeance and restore glory to their name.

CONCLUSION

Female Rage has a history of being ridiculed in popular culture, where it was either misrepresented or ignored. Further, gender and gender roles dictate how differently society perceives rage in men and women. Contemporary feminist writers are on task to shift this perception into a more positive light. Analysing the selected texts through Judith Butler's gender theory provides a deeper understanding of the complexities of female rage. Holding to Butler's understanding that gender is a socially constructed concept, it brings forth society's bid to control not only a woman's actions but her emotional responses to the oppression she is faced with as well. Also, the gender binary and its compliance are ensured by society to maintain its power; anyone who steps outside the binary norms is automatically labelled an anomaly. Although Butler suggests that gender is performative, when performed as per social norms, it becomes regressive and constrictive. Understanding and theorising the intersection of female rage with race, sexuality, and class calls for future research.

REFERENCES

- Allen, Paige. 2023. "Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity: Definition, Examples & Analysis." Perlego Knowledge Base.
<http://www.perlego.com/knowledge/study-guides/what-is-judith-butlers-theory-of-gender-performativity/>
- Balanescu, Miriam. 2022. "Female Rage: The Brutal New Icons of Film and TV." BBC News.
<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20221011-female-rage-the-brutal-new-icons-of-film-and-tv>

- Butler, Judith. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Gordon, Sherri. 2023. "This Is Why the #MeToo Movement Matters." *Verywell Mind*, April 28.
<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-the-metoo-movement-4774817>
- Kirby, Vicki. 2007. "Gender, Sexuality, Performance – Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity." *Judith Butler: Live Theory*, 19–47.
<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472545688.ch-002>
- Lentz, Kirsten Marthe. 1993. "The Popular Pleasures of Female Revenge (or Rage Bursting in a Blaze of Gunfire)." *Cultural Studies* 7 (3): 374–405.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09502389300490271>
- Motro, Daphna, Jonathan B. Evans, Aleksander P.J. Ellis, and Lehman Benson III. 2022. "The 'Angry Black Woman' Stereotype at Work." *Harvard Business Review*, January 31.
<https://hbr.org/2022/01/the-angry-black-woman-stereotype-at-work>
- Orgad, Shani, and Rosalind Gill. 2019. "Safety Valves for Mediated Female Rage in the #MeToo Era." *Feminist Media Studies* 19 (4): 596–603.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1609198>.
- Suri, Tasha. 2021. *The Jasmine Throne*. London: Orbit.
- Zhao, Xiran Jay. 2021. *Iron Widow*. Toronto, Ontario: Penguin Teen.