

Feminist Stylistics Analysis of the Movie “Gangubai Kathiawadi”: The Queen of Kamathipura who Defied Gender Inequality

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ABSTRACT

This research was aimed at analyzing gender inequality and social discrimination in the movie “Gangubai Kathiawadi” describing how women and gender roles presented in texts by applying a feminist approach. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, this study explores the dialogue in the movie at three different levels; words level, phrase/sentence level, and discourse level. The primary objective of this research is to see how gender bias is depicted through texts. One of the main findings of this study is that women in brothels are often treated as lawbreakers, even though they are often in oppressive situations and how the main character in this movie tries to fight for the rights and integrity of women. The dialogue in the movie successfully depicts the injustice experienced by women. Reinforcing the idea that justice, security, and a decent life are the rights of all women, regardless of their jobs.

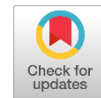
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INTRODUCTION

Gender issues refer to the challenges and disadvantages that people face because of their gender. In many societies, men and women do not always have equal opportunities or rights, creating social injustice, and women are often the targets of gender inequality, which introduces us to the term’s discrimination against women. "In a male dominated society women's rights have been misunderstood because of cultural, customary practices and beliefs which encouraged discrimination against women." (Emea & Georgina, 2017).

Discrimination and inequality against women occur when women are treated unfairly just because they are female. It affects various aspects of life, including employment, education, and leadership opportunities. Women often face significant barriers such as wage gaps, lack of representation in decision-making positions, and restrictions in legal rights. In some countries, women even still struggle to access education. Traditional expectations also play a role in discrimination and inequality, as women are often expected to focus on household duties rather than pursuing a career or personal ambitions.

By addressing gender issues against women, feminism and gender equality work together to create a more just and balanced society. (Emea & Georgina, 2017) – In *We Should All Be Feminists*, defines feminism as “the belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes.”, while (Hooks, 2019)– In her book *Feminism is for Everybody*, defines feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.”

Feminism is not about giving women more power than men, but rather about ensuring that both men and women have equal rights, opportunities, and respect. This connects closely to the idea of gender equality, (Turner, 2020) – in his book *What Is Equality?* stated "gender

equality means, every person, regardless of their gender, gets an equal chance to succeed". Achieving gender equality means eliminating discrimination and oppression so that no one is disadvantaged simply because of their gender.

Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics. Stylistics analyze "style" in spoken or written language. (Simpson, 2004) in his book states that stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language. Stylistics is the study of language style in text of all types, particularly literary text. By combining the tools of formal linguistic analysis and the method of literary criticism, stylistics focusing its broad in creativity and innovation which can create deviation in literary texts. This aligns with (Simpson, 2004). To do stylistics is to explore language, and, more specifically, to explore creativity in language use. Doing stylistics thereby enriches our ways of thinking about language and, as observed, exploring language offers a substantial purchase on our understanding of (literary) texts. In analyzing literary texts, stylistics can be used to investigate the author's repetitive language style patterns.

Stylistics is divided into several subfields, one of which is feminist stylistics. Feminist stylistics is a branch of stylistics that examines the relationship between language styles and gender. Feminist stylistics can be defined as the sub-branch of stylistics which aims to account for the way in which gender concerns are linguistically encoded in texts, and which attempts to do so by employing some of the frameworks and models pertaining in the stylistics tool-kit (Montoro, 2015). Feminist stylistics try to analyze texts through feminist lens and uncover how gender influences the language and become a pattern. This approach specifically examines how men and women are portrayed in literary work by looking at the language style. Feminist stylistics term was first introduced by Sara Mills in 1995. This is a theoretical framework used to analyze how language through linguistics plays an important role in construction of gender norms and ideology.

In this study, the researchers analyze how gender is depicted in the film "Gangubai Kathiawadi" by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Gangubai Kathiawadi is an Indian Hindi-language biographical crime drama film that was released in 2022. This film is about a sex worker and brothel life in Kamathipura area of Mumbai during the 1960's. The film portrayed injustice and inequality which was felt by the women at that era. Gangubai as the main character is a symbol of hope where she seeks to fight for women's equality.

Research that analyzes literary work that use feminist stylistics by Sarah Mills previously has been done by some researchers. Some research that has relevance on this research analysis is analysis by (Hashmi & Asif, n.d.) that analyzes a short story entitled "The Optimist" written by Bina Shah found out the ways women express their bodies and choose clothing that are viewed derogatory in patriarchal society.

Further research conducted by (Manurung et al., 2023) analyzes Ava Max's "Not Your Barbie Girl" using a feminist stylistic analysis approach with Sarah Mills' theory, focusing on its message of women's liberation and rejection of gender stereotypes. This research found that the song adopts a strong feminist perspective, emphasizing self-empowerment, resilience, and rejecting societal-constraints.

Another research conducted by (Caroline et al., 2023). This research analyzes a song entitled "The Man" by Taylor Swift focuses on kinds of feminism and explains about feminism expressed about women's social aspects with Sarah Mills' feminist stylistic. This research found that there are some gaps and challenges faced by women in society, thereby encouraging listeners to question and challenge these norms from the words, phrases, and sentences chosen.

According to some researches that use feminist stylistic by Sarah Mills on some kinds of literary works, most of the previous studies examine literary work such as songs and short story down to the level of words, sentences, and discourse in written text (Caroline et al., 2023; Hashmi & Asif, 2023; Manurung et al., 2023). However, in discourse level, there is no research that explicitly analyzes narrative structures and character interactions because the previous research objects (short story and songs) are not very complex in terms of narrative. Referring to some previous studies, the focus of discourse level that researched is gender discourse and

Feminist Stylistics Analysis of The Movie "Gangubai Kathiawadi": The Queen of Kamathipura Who Defied Gender Inequality ideology (Caroline et al., 2023; Hashmi & Asif, 2023; Manurung et al., 2023). On other focus of discourse analysis, previous study included social representation in text in the form of song lyrics (Caroline et al., 2023; Manurung et al., 2023).). Based on the topic of the approaches at the discourse level that have been mentioned, previous studies have not yet reached a broader analysis of narrative structure, point of view, and interaction character in constructing gender discourse.

Therefore, this study proposes an analysis result in gender representation and inequality not only on words and sentences level, but also on discourse level through film by considering narrative structure and character interactions which has not been discussed much before. Thus this research has the potential to broaden the scope of feminist stylistics and provide new contributions to gender studies in film media.

This research aims to identify how The Gangubai Kathiawadi movies represent feminist, specifically how gender inequality is depicted in this movie by analyzing the transcript or film subtitle using feminist stylistic approach by Sarah Mills. This approach is implemented to explore and analyze the linguistic structure on three main levels: words, sentences, discourses level. Furthermore, this research also deepens the social and cultural context that build and support feminist atmosfeer in the film to understand how the narrative and representation on Gangubai Kathiawadi reflects resistance to gender inequality in a social patriarchal environment

METHOD

The research method used in this study is qualitative. Qualitative research is a method used to gather data in a natural setting, emphasizing how individuals or groups interpret and make sense of their experiences. The focus is on understanding human behavior in its context (Bogdan & Biglen, 2007). This study uses a qualitative method, specifically qualitative descriptive because this study will provide insight and knowledge from the results of the analysis and straightforwardly describe it. Qualitative descriptive is a widely used research method for exploring the who, what, and where of events or experiences, and gaining insights into poorly understood phenomena. It is often chosen when a straightforward description is needed or to develop and refine questionnaires or interventions (Neergard et al., 2009; Sullivan-boiyen et al., 2005) in (Kim et al., 2017).

The object of this study is a film titled "Gangubai Kathiawadi". This object can be found on Netflix. Data collection is done through watching, listening and understanding the dialog in the film, then analyzing the context of the words and sentence in the film using feminist stylistics theory. Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics theoretical framework being a guideline in analysis of the data. Mills has divided her model or tool kit in three levels which are word level, phrase or sentence level and discourse level, and these will be applied to reveal gender inequality in the movie.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis at Words Level

According to Mills (1995:18) in (Montoro, 2013) words are not neutral; they carry with them the weight of ideological and cultural histories. In feminist stylistics, the focus is on how words shape our understanding of gender, power, and identity. At the level of words, we can observe how gender is embedded in language. The way words are used in literature or everyday speech reflects traditional gender roles and often positions women in subordinate or passive roles (Mills, 1995) in (Montoro, 2013). In this part, the focus of research refers to several words that are found in the Gangubai Kathiawadi film transcription that indicate gender representation.

Table 1. Feminine and Masculine Words in Film Transcription

Feminine	Minute (Scene)	Masculine	Minute (Scene)
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Feminist Stylistics Analysis of The Movie "Gangubai Kathiawadi": The Queen of Kamathipura Who Defied Gender Inequality

Beautiful	00:04:10	Master	00:08:14
Prostitute	01:26:16	Sir	01:04:48
Madam	00:27:45	Leader	00:30:20
Dignity	02:09:18	Power	00:35:50
Integrity	02:10:15	Strength	00:40:30
Wife	02:05:14	Boss	00:45:30
Whore	00:37:09	Man	01:02:15
Daughter	01:27:06	Son	01:27:45
Queen	01:05:04	King	01:12:40
Black Rose	02:22:50	Pimp	01:25:20
Justice	00:34:52	Judge	01:30:50
Brothel	01:04:09	Brothel Owner	01:45:10
Mother	00:13:58	Husband	01:27:50

The analysis result is based on the transcription of the Gangubai Kathiawadi movie, there 25 words that indicate feminine and masculine terms according to feminist stylistic by Sarah Mills. The words can refer to denotative or connotative meaning based on the context of the movie and also social context. The words that indicate feminine and masculine terms are categorized in several parts.

Gendered Titles and Address Form

The words "sir", "madam", "beautiful", "master", "boss", "leader", and "judge" indicate respect or positions of authority. Some words such as "master" and "boss" even have connotations of domination that are frequently associated with male authority.

Familial Terms

Kinship roles are defined in these terms, and it frequently serves to reinforce gender norms and expectations in society. The words that are categorized in this term include "daughter", "son", "wife", "husband", "mother", and "brother".

Derogatory Terms for Women

The words "prostitute" and "whore" can be categorized as derogatory terms for women. These derogatory terms demonstrate how language frequently frames women's identities through their sexuality.

Power and Authority

The words "king", "queen", "leader", "justice", "strength", and "power" can be categorized in power and authority. These words symbolize government and leadership that are close to power. The word "king" is traditionally associated with strength, while the word "queen" can have both submissive and powerful meanings. These terms represent leadership and government.

Marginalized and Oppressed Groups

The words "prostitute", "brothel", "black rose", "pimp", and "brothel owner" relate to the sex work industry and its power hierarchies. This term shows how gender intersects with exploitation.

Virtue and Identity

The transcription in Gangubai Kathiawadi frequently uses these terms, the words "dignity" and "integrity" stand for personal attributes that reinterpret respect for women in the brothel.

Analysis at Phrase/Sentence Level

In the analysis of sentence level uses feminist stylistics in the film Gangubai Kathiawadi, one of the main issues found is gender inequality. Through various dialogues in the film, it can be clearly seen how gender inequality is a major problem faced by women in their lives, especially in their surroundings. The dialogues depict harsh social realities, where women are often treated unequally to men, both in terms of access to power, freedom, and fair treatment. This inequality is seen not only in daily interactions, but also in the way society views women, who are often seen as inferior or powerless. Using a feminist stylistic approach, this analysis aims to reveal how the language and style choices in the dialogues in the film reflect gender inequality that occurs in society.

Data 1

"Beating up a woman? you're not a man". (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 40:08-40:11)

The data above highlights the injustice experienced by the speaker, Gangu, who suffered violent treatment from a man who beat and hurt her. Through this statement, Gangu questions the integrity and masculinity of the man who resorts to violence against a woman. By saying, "You're not a man," she implies that true masculinity is not defined by physical strength or dominance but by respect, self-control, and the ability to protect rather than harm. Her words challenge the deeply rooted societal norms that may tolerate or normalize violence against women, emphasizing that such actions are unacceptable and should not be associated with true manhood.

Data 2

"For the women of Kamathipura, Gangu is willing to sacrifice 100 Afshans." (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 1:30:46)

From the sentence said by Gangu above, we can see the immense sacrifices Gangu is willing to make in her fight for the rights, freedom, justice, and dignity of the women in Kamathipura. By saying, "Gangu is willing to sacrifice 100 Afshans," she conveys that she is prepared to give up even the people she loves the most for the greater good. Even if it means witnessing her loved one marry another woman, she is willing to endure the pain as long as it ensures that the women of Kamathipura receive the justice, protection, and respect they rightfully deserve. This powerful sentence shows Gangu's selfless commitment to improving the lives of the women around her, proving that her fight is not just personal but a fight for dignity and equality.

Data 3

"When women are the embodiment of power, wealth and intelligence, what makes these men feel superior?". (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 1:39:29)

This statement highlights the gender inequality experienced by women in Kamathipura, where men maintain a sense of superiority despite the strength, resilience, and capabilities of women. Many men believe that power, wealth, and intelligence are male attributes, disregarding the fact that women often embody these very qualities.

A common social stigma suggests that a man's status is measured by his ability to control or possess a woman, reinforcing the idea that women exist as mere symbols of a man's success. However, Gangu's statement breaks this stigma with sharp sarcasm, questioning why men continue to feel superior when, in reality, women are the true representation of power, wealth, and intelligence. Through this powerful remark, she emphasizes that men should not assume exclusivity over these things, as women themselves are the true benchmark of strength and success. In truth, it is women who deserve recognition, respect, and the right to define their own worth.

Data 4

"We cannot enroll your girls here". (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 1:54:22)

This sentence was uttered directly by the principal of the school that the children of brothel women will attend. This statement clearly reflects the injustice experienced by brothel women, the impact of which is felt not only by them, but also by their children. These children,

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although they may not be directly involved in their mother's work, are punished in an unfair way, by being denied the opportunity to get an education simply because of the stigma attached to their mother's status as a brothel woman. This reflects deep social discrimination, which not only harms the individual, but also limits the future of the next generation, who should have the same right to education and fair opportunities.

Data 5

"We work bloody hard! what's wrong in that?" (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 2:08:53)

From the data above, we can see that this sentence shows that the speaker, Gangu and other brothel women have worked very hard. They also went through many bad experiences from doing this job, but even so there are still many people who underestimate and look down on their work. In fact, they choose this job is not because of personal desire, but because circumstances force them. They are forced to do the work as the only way to survive. Many people judge their work with a negative view, without considering the factors underlying their decisions. Ironically, although this work is often despised, the man themselves come to the brothels with full awareness and without any coercion from any part. In other words, even though they are the ones who use the services, society often does not see that injustice and gender inequality play a role in choosing this work as a last resort.

Data 6

"Why are we excluded from your society?". (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 2:10:36)

This sentence shows how Gangu and other brothel women are often excluded from their social circles and are excluded from their social circle. They are often not accepted or considered part of the society around them. As a result, these women often feel marginalized and lack adequate social support, which worsens their condition both psychologically and economically. The social stigma of their work is often a major reason why they are not included in social activities or accepted back into the wider community.

Data 7

"We have fire in us and yet bloom like a rose." (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 2:11:12)

In this statement, Gangu highlights the strength and dignity that she and all women should uphold. The words "fire" and "rose" have opposite meanings—fire represents strength, struggle, and danger, while a rose symbolizes beauty, grace, and softness.

Through this sentence, Gangu shows how women, especially those in Kamathipura, face many hardships but still carry themselves with dignity. Even though their work is often seen as rough and risky, like fire, they continue to uphold their self-respect and inner beauty, like a blooming rose. Her words remind us that women can be both strong and graceful at the same time, proving that challenges do not take away their worth or integrity.

Data 8

"Gangubai made a speech at Azad Maidan not with her eyes downcast, but with her head held high!" (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 2:13:07)

This statement highlights Gangu's courage and determination as a speaker. The phrase "eyes downcast" symbolizes fear and submission, as people often lower their gaze when they feel intimidated or ashamed. In contrast, the phrase "head held high" represents confidence and bravery, as a strong and fearless person stands tall and looks forward with determination.

Through this sentence, Gangu challenges the stigma that women, especially prostitutes, are expected to feel ashamed and unworthy of respect. Society often looks down on them, assuming they have no right to speak with confidence. However, Gangu defies this perception by standing proudly and delivering her speech with boldness and dignity. Her actions send a powerful message that a person's worth is not defined by their past or circumstances, but by their courage, self-respect, and determination to fight for justice.

Data 9

"The seller and buyer should be punished, but who gets the punishment? That innocent girl" (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 2:20:52)

In this sentence, Gangu mentions the term 'the innocent girl,' which refers to the image of a woman who is considered innocent. This sentence shows a critique of an unfair system,

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where in the context of brothel work, both the seller and the buyer of sexual services should be punished. However, in reality, the ones who are always punished and seen as wrong are women, especially those involved in the work. They are actually the target of punishment and social stigma. In fact, they are only victims of an unfair system.

Data 10

"We're the victim and yet treated as criminal." (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 2:21:42)

In this sentence, there are the words 'victim' and 'criminal'. This sentence shows how the emerging view states that women who work as sex workers are victims who are trapped in an unfavorable situation. But ironically, they are treated like criminals, where their actions are often seen as a violation of the law or behavior that is not accepted by society, even though in reality they are often in conditions that require them to do this work in order to survive or because of other more complex factors. This shows the inconsistency between their status as victims and the treatment they receive from the legal system and the wider society.

Analysis at Discourse Level

Besides analyzing data in word level and sentence level, analyzing in discourse also needed to gain deeper understanding of meaning and context. Based on Mill's feminist theoretical framework, discourse level is the last part of analyzing the data. Discourse analysis objectives is to find out how language constructs gender ideology and stereotypes. In this study, discourse analysis reveals gender bias and gender inequality which is depicted in the movie by examining the distinctive patterns and structures in the text.

Data 1

"What's the point in sending her to school? she'll have to work in the brothel anyway". (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 51:49)

In the data above, we can see that the sentence refers to the stereotype of the society in Kamathipura at that time. The speaker, who is a woman, feels that women do not need to be educated. She feels that it is better for women to work as prostitutes in brothels because they can make money. Gangu, as the main character who heard this, immediately opposed this thought by saying *"What nonsense!...Listen, this is not right, Rajjo"* (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 51:53). Gangu disagreed with Rajoo, the woman's name. Gangu thinks that education is very important, not only for men, but also for women.

This mindset emerged because of the environmental conditions in Kamathipura. At that time, there were many women who did not continue their education and became prostitutes. They became prostitutes by choice or because of the demands of life. The prostitution industry had become common place, and the community does not oppose it. This is what caused the stereotype to emerge and spread widely throughout the community.

Data 2

"If Gangu can dream, then why can't Roshni". (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 1:26:40)

This statement is said by Gangu, where it also refers to the stereotype. In this statement, Gangu wants to let everyone know that they are allowed to have dreams, like her. At that period, the status of women was very low, while men were treated very special. Therefore, women felt that they did not deserve and have the right to dream. Only men were allowed to have dreams, and this stereotype is what Gangu is trying to fight against.

Data 3

"Dear, how can a prostitute be our daughter-in-law?". (Gangubai Khatiawadi, 1:28:31)

Two previous data refer to stereotypes which emerge among Kamathipura's people, meanwhile this data more into ideology. In Kamathipura, there is an ingrained stereotype that women are inferior, especially prostitutes. This stereotype has evolved and become a local belief. Parents do not accept women from brothels as their daughters-in-law. This happens because they think that prostitutes have no rights and do not deserve to be sons-in-law. Prostitutes are considered to be unholy and despicable, so they prefer women from respected families.

Data 4

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"Tie her legs tightly, Men cannot be trusted...not even with a dead body". (Gangubai Kathiawadi, 2:01:56)

In this movie, apart from stereotypes of women, there are also stereotypes of men. In this data, this sentence shows a huge sense of distrust by women towards men. They assume that men cannot be trusted, even with dead bodies. This stereotype arose because of the rampant cases of rape against women in that period. Tying the corpse's legs together is a form of anticipation of what men might do.

Data 5

"Why is only our profession seen as immoral?". (Gangubai Kathiawadi, 2:09:04)

This data is taken from Gangu's speech in Azad Maidan. In this sentence, Gangu explicitly asks the audience why they are treated differently. Society considers that working as a prostitute is despicable. This stereotype arises because society directly assesses how prostitutes live in brothels. People assume that their behavior does not reflect purity.

Data 6

"Don't our children have the right education?". (Gangubai Kathiawadi, 2:12:25)

Furthermore, this data also represents stereotypes that emerged among society. In this sentence, implicitly society treats girls from brothels unequally. The right to education is severely restricted, with the community assuming that girls from brothels do not deserve an education. This, of course, triggers protests and disappointment towards society.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explores how language represents gender bias, specifically gender inequality in the movie "Gangubai Kathiawadi", identifying 3 levels of analyzing: (1) Word levels, (2) Phrase/Sentences levels, (3) Discourse levels. As a result, we found several words that represent gender specific at word level. At word level, there are 13 terms that refer to female and male. Therefore, there are 10 sentences in sentence level which indicates gender bias. At last, we found 6 sentences at the discourse level that construct ideas and stereotypes, where the most stereotypes are towards women. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that this movie reveals gender issues in Kamathipura. This movie highlights the discrimination and inequality experienced by women. Therefore, this movie also depicts the ideologies and stereotypes that are widespread in society. Lastly, this study promotes more depth understanding in gender issues for the student who seeks references for their needs.

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