

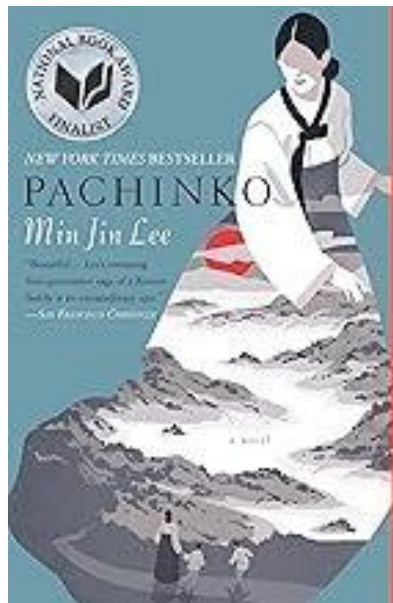
Understanding and Questioning History from the Perspective of Community Narratives and Gynocentric Narrations in Selected East Asian Texts

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Abstract

Being neighbouring nations and also because of the colonial influence of Japan over Korea, there are a lot of cross-cultural elements and influence present in the culture of both nations. When looking at the colonial history of Korea, one cannot ignore the tremendous influence placed by Japan over Korea. Korea was taken over by Japan in the year 1910, after

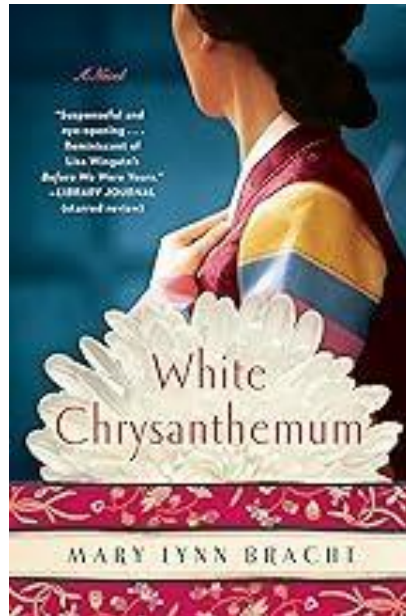
which the people living in both Japan and Korea became the imperial subjects answerable to the Emperor of Japan. The paper discusses three main novels, namely *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee, *White Chrysanthemum* by Mary Lynn Bracht and *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden. Placed in the period of World War II era and showcasing the Japanese rule over Korea, the novels present the wartime as well as post wartime conditions of the two countries.

Keywords: Community Narratives, Gynocentric Narrations, femimemory, *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee, *White Chrysanthemum* by Mary Lynn Bracht, *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden, wartime as well as post wartime conditions, South Korea, Japan,

Introduction

This paper explores the impact of community narratives and gynocentric narrations from the point of femimemory in relation to the literature written in the twentieth century with a special focus on Korea. The world has evolved and changed over the years, but man's need to control and conquer has not ended, but rather the techniques have become innovative. In today's world the concept of colonialism and its cruel aftereffects are a matter of the past, something to be forgotten. But the true reality is that it continues to exert power and influence over the former colonies in different forms unknown to the people. The colonial masters still continue to exert a subtle and dangerous power over the former colonial subjects, which is extended and driven by the various strategies they exercise.

South Korea and Japan are one of the most culturally and economically rich nations in today's world. Belonging to the Eastern part of the Asian continent, the two nations have a long standing history, a good geographical location and a very culturally rich society. Being neighbouring nations and also because of the colonial influence of Japan over Korea, there are a lot of cross-cultural elements and influence present in the culture of both nations. When looking at the colonial history of Korea, one cannot ignore the tremendous influence placed by Japan over Korea. Korea was taken over by Japan in the year 1910, after which the people living in both Japan and Korea became the imperial subjects answerable to the Emperor of Japan. The paper discusses three main novels, namely *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee, *White Chrysanthemum* by Mary Lynn Bracht and *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden. Placed in the period of World War II era and showcasing the Japanese rule over Korea, the novels present the wartime as well as post wartime conditions of the two countries.

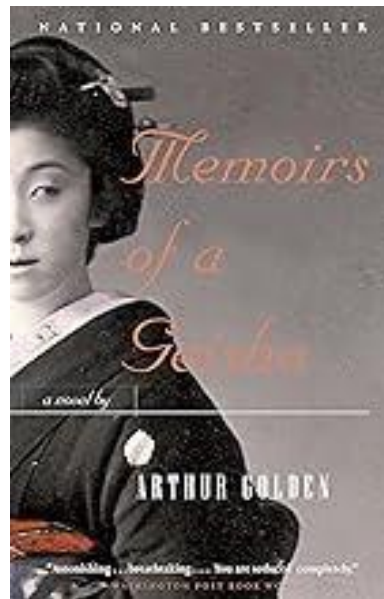


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Two out of three selected novels are based on outsider perspectives because they do not deal directly with the personal experiences of the author or the narrator, whereas the third one deals with an insider perspective. This paper makes use of two major frameworks: one is how the three novels become examples of community fiction and the second one explains how gynocentric narrations become counter-narratives. Exploring and analysing the texts from these two perspectives, the paper however also deals with the impact of colonialism on community life and the issue of central narratives that ignores the perspectives of the “other”. The selected communities for the frame of reference include: geishas, hanyeos and zainichi Koreans.

Introducing the issue of Zainichi Korean life in Japan as the central issue, Min Jin Lee presents *Pachinko* that traces the life of a family through five generations. The novel presents the life of the family in Korea and later on explains the situation of the family in Japan. The characters become the windows to the realities of war, Japanese rule, and many other issues that the Koreans faced under the Japanese rule, with Yeongdo as the main centre first and then it shifts to Osaka when Sunja moves with her husband. From then on the story shifts between Sunja and her sons, portraying through them the realities of the Zainichi life and the challenges of being a Korean in the Japanese society. *White Chrysanthemum* by Mary Lynn Bracht on the other hand depicts Jeju through the two central characters Hana and Emi, bringing to life the realities of war and post-war scenario of Korea. With the characters coming from the hanyeo community, the novel also depicts the impact of community life on the two central characters and how it takes precedence in their life, moving forward. It discusses important issues like Japanese rule, comfort women, Jeju massacre, the Korean War and many more. Intricately capturing the nuances of the Geisha lifestyle presented through Sayuri’s narrative, *Memoirs of a Geisha* is a coming of age story combined with the

realities of war. Sayuri's narrative brings in a lived in narration of the Geisha world with all its trappings and adornings, but also shows that Geisha lifestyle is not always a bed of roses.



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The term, Community Fiction was coined by Jeetumoni Basumatary (2019), in correlation to Sandra Zagerell's *Narratives of Community* (1988), which dealt with texts that concentrated on community life specifically. Included in community fiction were the integral aspects and factors that formed the identity as well as the performativity of the community. The angle of community fiction explored in the paper provides a better understanding of the community as well as traced the changes that it goes through over the years. The genre of community fiction presents an outlook of the whole community life with all its aspects and grandeur, through the narration of the daily activities of the community. Based on the characteristics laid down by Sandra Zagerell (1988), the paper tries to analyse if the selected works fall under the particular genre or not.

The next theoretical framework questions the production of formal narratives and omissions in cultural memory, in the context of gynocentric narrations used in the selected texts. Evaluating the texts in relation with gynocentric narrations, the texts provide an extensive overview of the silenced past of the different women from the selected communities. The novels provide testimonies of the trauma, pain and violence that these women have experienced due to various circumstances during the war. Through fictionalised narrative of the true incidents, the authors pay homage as well as try to rewrite or fill the gaps in history, which was otherwise left out.

Combining the insider and outsider perspectives, the authors provide persuasive stories about the realities of war. Gynocentric narration also brings to life the alternative versions of the same story presented from the perspective of women. The two outsider

perspectives of the zainichi community and the hanyeo community are written by ethnic Koreans from the information they gathered through various interviews, discussions and many more. However, the insider perspective given by Arthur Golden is a direct translation of the interview from a former Geisha which is presented by the author in his work. The limitation of the paper is that the outsider perspectives are presented by diasporic Korean writers who do not have the personal lived in experiences of the communities they discussed. Moreover, Golden's novel has received criticism for improper depiction and inappropriate adaptation of the real story.

Community Fiction and Community Life in Transition

Knowledge, traditions, beliefs and customs form an integral part of any community, unifying its members under a common roof. These characteristics make them a concrete group whose members preserve it for generations to come, later on becoming the foundations for a strong community. Unified by the common background of Japanese Colonialism, the selected works weave a tale of collective suffering, traumas, and loss. The communities that are brought to focus in the selected novels are the Geishas, Hanyeos and the Zainichi Koreans. Categorising them as artistic, professional and ethnic communities, the paper presents three different narrations and perspectives of life under Japanese imperialism and projects the influence of it on the communities. The community life that is affected by the war goes through a lot of changes before it finally settles into a new normal.

Discussed here are three communities that are deeply entrenched with the cultures and countries that they are a part of. Hanyeos belong to a collective that primarily focuses on diving and it goes on to become their primary source of income. Harvesting abalones, crabs, sea urchins, seaweed, shellfish, octopuses and many more that live among the rocks of the sea beds, the hanyeos survived. Predominantly belonging to the Islands of Jeju in South Korea, it is a professional community which was recently attributed with the title of being an intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO. The tradition of being a hanyeo is passed down from generation to generation, which includes learning diving work, a deep knowledge of the seas, deep diving skills, instincts and intuition, preservation of the ecology and many more that accompanies the work.

The community is largely women centric which is governed, protected and consisted by women. From earlier times, the diving work done by the hanyeos have been passed on from mothers to their daughters across Jeju and it is a matter of pride for the women when their daughters join them into the sea. They take pride in the work, independence and freedom that accompanies being a hanyeo. Over the years, the hanyeos from Jeju have witnessed the change of rulers and trepidations of war, which was followed by massacres and mass violence against their people. *White Chrysanthemum* by Mary Lynn Bracht pays homage to the turbulent history of Jeju and the violences wrecked on the land and its people with the change in the political environment of their country. By discussing the gruesome history, Bracht tries to bring the attention of the readers to a history which is hitherto unheard

of or not known to many. She deals in detail, the issues of comfort women, Japanese rule, the Korean War and many more in her novel.

The second community to be discussed is the Geisha community, which is based in the Gion district of Kyoto in the novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden. Kyoto is specifically known for being the geisha district which is filled with geishas, teahouses, Okiyas, and many more; hence attributed as the artistic district. Geishas are artists who are well versed in hosting customers and know a wide range of skills to entertain their guests. It is again a very ancient community which is famous for their skills, knowledge and practices that has been preserved for a very long time. The Geisha community is female centric and known for their status in society as entertainers and hosts. Kyoto being the cultural capital of Japan has a wide variety of arts and artists, among which the geishas have a significant role to play as they are acclaimed for their role as the symbol of Japanese culture and heritage.

Geishas belong to the artistic and professional community who are bound by the rules and regulations of their organisation. Being one of the important symbols of Japanese culture, geishas are sought out by people in society for entertainment as well as hosting purposes. As trained experts in singing, dancing, instrument playing and tea ceremonies, they are well sought after, hence keeping the traditions alive to this day. In reality they are master entertainers, who become the life and soul of every function, but something to be remembered is that it is an acquired position from years of training. But Geishas should never be confused with courtesans or prostitutes because they hold a very revered position in the Japanese society which is way above them.

Traditionally, the predecessors of the Geishas can be traced back to the Haein period in Japan called Shirabyoshi (Gallagher 2003, p.99). During the Haein period, women actively participated in the matters of the court, they were also well known for their knowledge and beauty, and as a result many nobles desired them (Downer 2002, p. 37). In many cases, daughters of the Geishas follow the path of their mothers as they are well versed with the prerequisites, expectations and practice that the profession demands. Being a professional geisha takes a lot of patience, practice and persistence because the training itself is very demanding. From shamisen training, tea ceremonies, singing and dancing to performing Kabuki plays, geishas are expected to be experts in arts. The significance of their position in Japanese society is irreplaceable and in today's world it has gone on to become one of the major factors for the popularity of Kyoto as well as other Geisha districts.

The third community is the Zainichi Korean community, who are a minority community that has settled down in Japan. The community consists of Koreans from different parts of Korea who immigrated to Japan during the Japanese rule looking for better opportunities. The minority community then settled down here even after the wars either because they had nowhere else to go, had no money to travel back or because of the worse situations back home. The community consists of the migrants from Korea and their

descendants who have settled down in Japan. Many returned after Japanese troops withdrew from Korea but the condition back home prompted them to come back.

The Zainichi Korean women were one of the most marginalised communities in Japan because as a group without much agency and power, they fell among the lowest in the ladder of hegemony. Newlywed and shipped off with strangers as husbands, the girls had no idea of what awaited them. The Japanese were a very dominant group that believed in the glory of their civilization and wanted to promote it throughout the neighbouring countries. In their eyes, the Koreans were an inferior race without much potential for greatness or governance. So during the Japanese rule in Korea, it became a colony of Japan after its annexation and hence became Japanese nationals as well as the Emperor's children. But after the Japanese retreated from Korea, the Koreans living in Japan became resident foreigners living in Japan because of the signing of the San Francisco Treaty of 1952 (Lie, 2008). They became outsiders without citizenship in the country that they settled in.

The Zainichi Koreans lived in hostile and pitiable conditions in Japan without the ability to change their conditions. It is only in 1965, when the diplomatic relations were established between South Korea and Japan, that the Koreans who opted for South Korean nationality through the Mindan organisation received permanent residence in Japan and those who were on the Chongryun side remained stateless as they supported North Korea. Later on, in 1982 all Koreans gained permanent residence in Japan (xviii).

Reflecting on the experiences of expatriate life from the personal experiences of the Zainichi Koreans, Min Jin Lee writes the novel *Pachinko* with the Ikaino ward in Osaka as the background. Ikaino ward was famously known as the ghetto where the Koreans lived in segregation from the Japanese mainstream society. With Sunja and her family at the center, Min Jin Lee weaves a tale of persistence and fortitude of a family to strive in a world that tries to suppress them.

The genre of community fiction entered the field of academia relatively late, even though its traces could be found in history. Unlike the other genres, Sandra Zagerell (1988) states that the community narratives don't have linear developments but rather it sticks to a specific geographical phase and is rooted in process. "They tend to be episodic, built primarily around the continuous small-scale negotiations and daily procedures through which communities sustain themselves. In keeping with the predominant focus on the collective life of the community, characterization typically exemplifies modes of interdependence among community members" (Zagerell, 1988, p. 503).

They acquaint the readers with the culture, local life, food habits, practices and many more which are an integral part of any specific community. Sandra Zagerell, calls it narrative of community and states that, works under this category "portray the minute and quite ordinary processes through which the community maintains itself as an entity"(499). As per Zagerell (1988), she presents works set before the pre-industrial era to confront the capitalist

society of the twentieth century. Echoing through her words are the reflections of diverse changes that the community life goes through because of the introduction of Industrialization and a gradual transition into a capitalist society.

The impact of Japanese colonization and the resulting changes of the rule on its colonies are unmistakably presented by Arthur Golden, Mary Lynn Bracht and Min Jin Lee in their respective novels. With Sunja, Chiyo, Hana and Emi as the central characters, the authors present the community life and its gradual transition from the past into the modern world after World War II in a smooth manner. For Sunja, her life being uprooted and placed from her homeland to a foreign country is in itself a big change. Through her eyes, the readers are presented with the past, present and future of the Zainichi community living in Japan before and after the war. From complete outcasts to tolerated members, the readers get to see how the Japanese society changes to accommodate this minority into their world, but it is not a life without struggles.

The Baek family house is the place of action for *Pachinko* and Isak bringing Sunja to Osaka puts things into motion for the story. Isak's life as a pastor and Yoseb's life as a factory worker leads them to meet people from different backgrounds presenting a community that is in strong need of hope, acceptance and salvation. Unable to survive the living conditions, facing segregation from the Japanese and suppressing the growth of the Koreans, the Japanese exercised firm control over the community. The changes in Zainichi life of Sunja structures around Koh Hansu, Garo, Korean organisations and Pachinko, hence they are the turning points of her life. Looking at the life of other Koreans around her, the majority of them resorted to peddling, brewing illegal alcohol, working in factories, selling metal scraps or opening yakiniku restaurants in order to support their families.

To survive in a capitalist society like Japan which is hell-bent on never letting the Koreans succeed, Koh Hanasu gets a cheat code which he tries to present to his only son with Sunja which ends in failure. But Garo's technique is much more effective because it helps Mozasu for the long run and makes him a better man. Sunja's two sons present two ideologies existing within the Zainichi Koreans, first is to mimic the Japanese and try to become like them, which Noa embraces resulting in his doom. The second is to accept the Korean identity, make peace with it and patiently work through the available options which Mozasu adopts, making him successful in life. Presenting the two binaries, Jin Lee presents two facets of a changing community and choices which Sunja could never have.

From Mozasu's perspective, "Most Koreans in Japan had at least three names. Mozasu went by Mozasu Boku, the Japanization of Moses Baek, and rarely used his Japanese surname, Bando, the tsume listed on his school documents and residency papers. With a first name from a Western religion, an obvious Korean surname, and his ghetto address, everyone knew what he was there was no point in denying it" (Lee, p. 269), whereas Noa thinks, "All my life, I have had Japanese telling me that my blood is Korean- that Koreans are angry, violent, cunning and deceitful criminals. All my life, I had to endure this. I tried to be as

honest and humble as Baek Isak was; I never raised my voice. But this blood, my blood is Korean, and now I learn that my blood is yakuza blood. I can never change this, no matter what I do.” (345)

When it reaches the next generation, Solomon has even better options because of Mozasu’s success. Solomon is able to get a good education with excellent opportunities opening up to him because of his qualifications which are a result of Mozasu’s hardwork. Along with it, the gradual change in the Japanese society is also visible when they start accepting the Koreans bit by bit. Without the work done by Garo, Mozasu and Sunja, Solomon could never have achieved the heights he aspired to. But a complete liberation and acceptance is still a taboo in Japanese society because from the instances of Noa and Solomon’s downfall from grace, it is clear that even though colonialism ended long back the neoliberal forces would never allow the postcolonial subjects to succeed.

Hanyeos from Jeju portray a community that has always existed separate from the mainland unaware of the changes happening around them. Being a self-sufficient and independent community, the hanyeos have always taken pride in their diving work and the freedom it presented them with. *White Chrysanthemum* presents a hanyeo community living under Japanese colonialism and which is well accommodated with the demands of the rule. Away from the mainland, Jeju enjoys many of its privileges but tragedy starts hitting them when the Japanese start laying down huge taxes, inflation on necessities and took up control of the economy. After that, misfortune started rolling down like waves on the hanyeos as one after the other their men were called off for war, the girls from the villages started disappearing and violence was perpetuated on the public.

A community which prided in their freedom was rowed down with the loss of its family members. Even when rule changed hands from the Japanese to the Americans and from the Americans to the Koreans themselves, violence and oppression continued. The community still persisted with the support from the members of the collective combined with their fierce survival instincts. They continued doing diving work, providing for the family and taking care of their members. Through Hana and Emi, Bracht depicts the two of the worst calamities that the hanyeo community faced: one was losing a daughter to forced prostitution and the other was mass massacres that wrecked Jeju during the Korean War. Hana’s life is steered away from a normal hanyeo life when she is captured by Captain Morimoto and Emi is forced to marry Hyunmo in order to survive. Forcefully separated and pressured into submission Hana as well as Emi have no choice but to go forward on the roads chosen for them.

Hana’s introduction into a new community where violence, rape, abuse and torture is a daily routine doesn’t bend her will. The memories of her former community grant her a strength that helps her escape her captors and find light at the end of a dark tunnel. Even though the community of the comfort women accept her, Hana never learns to be a part of it and rejects it, which is clear when she runs away from the brothel without thinking twice

about her sisters. This is so because Hana only considers her hanyeo sisterhood as her own, because even though she is concerned for the other girls in the brothel, she still leaves. Her thoughts before she leaves confirms it when she says, "It is too late. She cannot stay, not even to spare her sleeping friends. She rises to her feet and hurries to the door. She lets out a shaky breath as she tries the metal doorknob" (Bracht, p.151).

Emi is never separated from her sisterhood but the ravages suffered by Jeju had also affected her and her community of hanyeos, leaving them scarred for life. With both her parents killed by her own countrymen when Emi was young and helpless, the only way she could live on was by suppressing her memories and remaining silent. But Emi is unable to comprehend the things happening around her as her father and villagers get killed, her village gets destroyed and she is forcefully married to Hyunmo at the local police station. It is clear only when Hyunmo says, "Like many of them, I had to leave my home in the North and flee south of the line before the communists murdered me like they did my family. They took everything from me. From all of us. So we are marrying you to regain what we lost, but more importantly, to keep the communists out of the South, we must breed them out. It's for your own good . . . and the good of Korea" (112).

Compared to the hanyeos, the Geishas are a community that is predominantly focused on art. Being an essential part of Japanese society, Geishas enjoy a certain privilege and reputation in the society as cultural markers. *Memoirs of a Geisha* presents the before and afterlife of World War II as presented through the eyes of Sayuri who is a well-known Geisha from Gion. Tracing from the point where Sayuri is nine years old and sold to the Okiya by Mr Tanaka, the story moves from the time of Mameha and Hatsumomo as established geishas, to the time of Sayuri and Pumpkin as the most sought after Geishas of their time, who are their respective apprentices. When the story moves from Mameha's time to Sayuri's success, it simultaneously reflects on the war and the changing community.

As a community that survives on art, sponsors and audiences, the Geisha community suffered severely during the war. This is clear when even Sayuri who is one of the most successful Geishas of her time had to select a danna who would help her Okiya survive during the war. For this purpose, the Mother selects a General who is in charge of rations for the military under Mameha's suggestion. Sayuri's success on the other hand also leads to the downfall of Hatsumomo and Pumpkin, as she gets adopted as the daughter of the Okiya. The competition and challenges of the profession are hard on the less fortunate ones as they have no choice but to adhere to the complexities that come along with choosing the profession.

The Geisha community is a community that survives with the efforts of all the members that constitute in upholding it, but the irony is that its downfall also rests on the same. Being on wrong terms with them means a black mark on the Geisha's career as these stakeholders can end it easily. The community is supported by artisans, teahouse owners, makeup artists, instructors, wealthy businessmen and many more. After the ravages of war, the Geisha culture that was resuscitated was never the same because many of the Geishas had

left the profession, alongside that many Okiyas and teahouses were also shut down. The makeup artists, instructors and many others had to change professions in order to survive in a post war society where their demand was less.

Looking at the three novels, the paper presents how the selected communities are not presented as rigid but fluid and in transition. Taking into account the socio-political and economic factors that accompany wars the communities are affected severely to the point of extinction in certain cases. Evidently, the communities that emerge after the transitions do not remain the same because of the violent, abusive and oppressive environment it was met with. Some communities were affected harder whereas some others were not, but the compatriots of transition are the turning points in the story who either contribute positively or negatively to the character developments. The communities that emerged from the ashes of the old were more lenient, sporadic and weak.

Today the number of members of the communities are dwindling or dying down without any memory of the old ways. Among the Zainichi Koreans only a very few remember how to read or write in Korean because they have been incorporated into the Japanese society as a result of which they have forgotten their identity. Another factor is that the existing members are second, third or generations after those, who have no connections with their homeland and are the naturalized citizens of Japan. The Geisha and Hanyeo community is a community that has very few members left because not many are coming forward to keep it alive. The problems that hanyeos face are with regards to dwindling members, polluted sea waters, organisms facing extinction, and risks of deep diving without proper equipment. Even the Geisha culture well known for its aesthetics and artistry is dying down because of dwindling numbers. Despite the fact that the rules and regulations have become flexible the numbers of girls who join have lessened.

The three novels with a connection to a specific point in history converge together as symbols of community life and act as an acknowledgement of the horrors of war. Experiencing the past from the perspective of the characters, the reader gets to experience the war and its repercussions faced by the community. The novels by the selected authors are a result of the number of interviews, research and exploration they did which perform the role of acting as a witness to the terrors of Japanese Imperialism.

Gynocentric Narration as Counter Narratives

Taking into consideration the official perspectives of war, in most cases the formal accounts fail to include the gynocentric perspectives of war. Even though war affects the community as a whole, the formal narratives are predominantly silent about the sufferings of women; they are either neglected or overlooked. This is the case in majority of the communities around the world, where the voices of the women have less significance and autonomy. Throughout the ages, the representation of women in literature and arts were quite different than that of men, which is clear when Nina Auerbach says, “As a recurrent literary

image, a community of women is a rebuke to the conventional ideal of a solitary woman living for and through men, attaining citizenship in the community of adulthood through masculine approval alone. The communities of women which have haunted our literary imagination from the beginning are emblems of female self-sufficiency which create their own corporate reality, evoking both wishes and fears” (Auerbach 1978, p.5). As a result, the feminine communities examined here present the realities and trajectories that the imposition of Japanese Imperialism inflicted on its colonial subjects.

There are an enormous amount of works written on women whose identities get narrowed down to someone’s wife, daughter, sister and mother, but what must not be forgotten is that the identity of a woman is not just restricted to that. Auerbach reflects that, “The unformulated miracle of the community of women is its ability to create itself” (11). The formulated communities may be formed based on certain codes, which “can range from dogma to a flexible, private and often semi-conscious set of beliefs” (8-9) which are not always rigid. Because the community itself was private, informal, flexible and mercurial, nobody took it seriously but the irony is that, the fact that made it an ignominy became its privilege as well as pride.

The communities of women discussed in the paper are fractions in society belonging to South Korea and Japan, who are representations of the glorious and turbulent history filled with blood. The community experiences act as testimony to the ground realities of Wartime crimes and the post-war realities of the trauma suffered by them. The tirade of calamities that followed one after the other, because of the actions of people in power, wrecked the two nations beyond recognition. The authors discuss some of the important incidents in the current history through the vital protagonists and provide testimonial accounts of the true incidents, giving tangible evidence to the experiences.

The stories of women told or written by women present a very different reality that is different from the formal narrative because, the former provides a more intimate understanding and evokes empathy. The fictionalised account of the incidents aim to “fight against phallocentrism that construed them as inferior” (Stanley 2022, p.136) and bring to the surface the suppressed voices of the marginalized. Remembering history from the perspective of women through their recollections of the incidents from the past is termed as ‘femimemory’ by Maureen Stanley. According to her, “femimemory, the gynocentric recovery of memory, consists of the following elements: the acknowledgment that heteronormative patriarchy shapes historiography in the masculine resulting in the inferiorization or omission of the female sex; the moral imperative to recover and vindicate the role of women in history or the past; the empathetic identification with women’s experiences and traumas; and the commitment to a more just world through the transmission of women’s stories” (136).

By retelling the stories from the perspective of women, the writers are trying to provide agency and legitimacy to incidents that occurred. Here the fictionalised version of the

stories presents female communities that support, care and become the strength of each other. The novels demonstrate the forced silences of the women especially within communities with regard to the wartime crimes. “Gynocentric works of memory shed light on the gendered omissions within cultural memory” (137). What is to be noted in common for all the three selected works is that Arthur Golden, Mary Lynn Bracht and Min Jin Lee have written their works after collecting information from the testimonial accounts of survivors and members from the communities. Stanley feels that, “Femimemory counteracts the hypermasculinized authoritarian regime. It is the antithesis of phallo-fascist mandated assimilatory forgetting. Femimemory actively and intentionally foils the legacy of misogynistic omissions or revisionist constructs. Femimemorial cultural production remedies both intentional and unintentional complicity in silence” (137).

When the question of the regime comes up it is not just the Japanese, but the leaders from North Korea and South Korea also come into the picture because the crimes continued even during the post-war era. By collecting the female testimonies, the authors create fictionalised versions of the events thus storing the memory of the female trauma into the cultural memory. The accounts given by the survivors become the backstories for the novels on the basis of which the community narratives are structured being the voices of the unheard.

The Zainichi Korean community residing in Japan is one of the most marginalized communities residing in Japan who have been facing discrimination and segregation from the Japanese society for their Korean identity. Sufferings of Sunja and other women like her point to a reality that is not well heard of. Unlike the well-known stories of European colonialism, the consequences of Japanese colonialism are not talked about quite often. Like the neighbouring countries, the undivided Korea belonging to that period went through harsh changes with the invasion of the Japanese troops.

Living in a patriarchal society Sunja, Kyunghee, Hana, Emi and Sayuri become central and important characters in the novels only when men notice them. It is as if their lives have no significance until and unless a man notices them or appreciates them. Even though the communities of the Hanyeo, Geishas and the Zainichi Korean women are self-sufficient, it is only the presence of the males among them that gives them prominence or visibility. Without the men that surround them or help in upholding the communities, the feminine communities would perish. Koh Hansu is the first person to ever properly notice and give attention to Sunja; who later goes on to become her first love. He doesn't reject her when he knows she is pregnant, but Sunja decides not to lead a life as a mistress and help comes again when Baek Isak agrees to take responsibility by marrying her, thus saving her from shame.

In a world where women were suppressed, forced or coerced into sexual slavery, Sunja lives a protected life because of the influence of Koh Hansu, who constantly guides her through difficult situations but at the same time lets her maintain autonomy over her life.

Under the guise of factory jobs, labour recruitment and forced migration, many women were taken away for sexual labour in enemy camps, against which Hansu gives prior warnings to Sunja. Unlike Kyunhee (Isak's sister-in-law), Sunja has always known work and the difficulties of managing a house working with her mother. So, when the time comes she isn't ashamed to go out, find work or find the means to help her family survive. In a cut-throat world, Sunja realises that if she needs to take care of her sons she cannot sit idle but find any means necessary to make money. Being an illiterate, she faces a lot of difficulties, but her street smartness helps her adapt quickly. Sunja's life is a representation of the life of a woman in Korean society and the Zainichi life in Japan. Being a girl she was never sent to school and always helped her mother maintain the Inn doing all the housework. Even though she had to work hard, Sunja had everything and her mother made sure of that. But in Osaka, she leads a different life which is filled with poverty, discrimination and exploitation which is a part and parcel of the Zainichi life. Min Jin Lee paints Ikaino in the following way,

“Ikaino was a misbegotten village of sorts, comprised of mismatched, shabby houses. The shacks were uniform in their poorly built manner and flimsy materials. Here and there, a stoop had been washed or a pair of windows polished, but the majority of the facades were in disrepair. Matted newspapers and tar paper covered the windows from inside, and wooden shims were used to seal up the cracks. The metal used on the roof was often rusted through. The houses appeared to have been put up by the residents themselves using cheap or found materials—not much sturdier than huts or tents. Smoke vented from makeshift steel chimneys. It was warm for a spring evening; children, half-dressed in rags, played tag, ignoring the drunken man asleep in the alley. A small boy defecated by a stoop not far from Yoseb's house” (Lee, p.111).

When the men leave for work, it is the women who have the responsibility of maintaining the house and taking care of the family. In Ikaino, many of the Koreans lived together with pigs in their houses, did jobs in factories, sold metal scraps, brewed illegal alcohol or did some other work. Since the Koreans had no chance to be successful following the proper route of education or by getting good jobs, they had to resort to illegal means in order to survive. Lee explains the same here,

“Mozasu knew he was becoming one of the bad Koreans. Police officers often arrested Koreans for stealing or home brewing. Every week, someone on his street got in trouble with the police. Noa would say that because some Koreans broke the law, everyone got blamed. On every block in Ikaino, there was a man who beat his wife, and there were girls who worked in bars who were said to take money for favors” (269).

Because the majority of them couldn't stand the bullying, discrimination and hatred they experienced in schools as well as work places, many quit. Because the living conditions were bad, the pay was less, and they even had to face discrimination as well as oppression from the Japanese, the Koreans suffered. In many cases, the men resorted to violence and abused the women in the family, unable to withstand the pressure of living in Japanese

society. Some men were hauled off to jails, ran off or kept other women, completely ignoring their families. Therefore, the burden of the family usually fell on the women.

Sunja's growth also depicts the different periods of Japanese colonialism and the changes happening in Zainichi life in Japan. It starts from the period of Japanese colonialism and moves to the post war reality of Zainichi life. The life of her sons and grandson is a depiction of the changing laws as well as the existent condition of the Zainichis in Japan. From being immigrants, their life moved from resident foreigners to temporary citizens and from there to permanent citizens in 1982. Thus far they had to live in the country unsure of their identity or position, even though some of them were born in Japan.

Sunja's protected life in Ikaino is toppled when her husband Isak is taken away by the police. From then on Sunja's life becomes a struggle for survival like many others. Koh Hansu's continued presence in her life saves her and her family, but that is not the case for many other women living in Ikaino. Sunja's story is the story of many others like her who struggle to live in a society that rejects them. Being a widow within a few years of marriage, she has no choice but to rely on the men surrounding her because she is illiterate and the society is patriarchal. Unable to help her sons, Sunja has no alternatives left but to take the help of Koh Hansu and Garo, which later on leads her sons into two different paths in life.

The life of the women in this community is stacked with pain, suffering and turmoil. Being a woman in Korean society means the majority of the girls are uneducated, so when they go to Japan and are left to fend for themselves as well as their family, they are left utterly powerless. Women are privy to the intimate details of the family, hence they are aware of the grievances of their children and husband, but left powerless to help them. Unable to provide the children with proper education and incapable of protecting them from the injustices of living in Japan, the women have seen many of their family members perish. Racism is apparent when the Koreans are mocked for their food habits, clothing, language, living conditions and many others. The Japanese were very monoethnic (Lie 2008, p.2), never giving other communities any opportunity, space or acceptance, but completely rejected or ignored them.

The ground reality of the effects of Japanese colonialism in Korea is more discernible in the background of Jeju, which is aptly portrayed by Mary Lynn Bracht. Occurrences in Jeju are just a miniature effect of what actually happened all over Korea. Korea was in distress because, "The villagers were tired of the heavy taxes, the forced donations to the war effort, and the taking of men to fight on the front lines and children to work in factories in Japan"(Bracht, p.6). The country portrayed in the story is an undivided Korea and the protagonists have no idea of a Korea before war, since they were born after its annexation. Hana and Emi are representatives of the hanyeo community that specialises in diving work. Even though many religions like Shamanism and its practices were banned by the Japanese, the hanyeos continued them in secret. The introduction of the Japanese language, naming

system, cultural practices, religion and many others was an act of suppression of the Korean identity which was followed stringently by them.

Reading from the experiences of the Hanyeos, it is clear that the community has seen things getting worse one after the other. Unable to question the discrimination and afraid of incurring harm on their family, many remained quiet. Sunja's father, Hoonie, learning from his parents, never got distracted with the politics of his country because he had to take care of his family. Same way, Hana's father is incapable of resisting when his brother is called in to enlist in the army because he knows that his family will face the wrath, especially his daughters. It was a time when the hanyeos were coming to know of the girls disappearing from their villages who were taken away to different places for servicing the soldiers in army camps. The community known for their freedom and independence cowered down in order to protect their daughters and family members. Hana remembers her uncle when she is being taken away, she thinks "Four years ago, her uncle was sent to fight the Chinese in the Japanese emperor's name. He was instructed to report to this police station. Few Koreans held official positions, and if they did, they were sympathizers, loyalists to the Japanese government, traitors to their own countrymen. They made her uncle enlist and fight for a country he despised" (24).

Incidents of rape, disappearance and violence against women had increased as a result of which the families kept their girls closer. Sunja and Hana are victims of wartime cruelties against women, but the difference is that Sunja was saved by the timely intervention of Hansu, whereas Hana went on to become a comfort woman. The latter was captured by Captain Morimoto when she was trying to save her little sister Emi. In the truck that Hana is forced into, she finds many girls and women who were captured like her from all over Jeju. Next when she is taken away into a different route in a ferry and moved into trains to Manchuria, she finds many girls who were captured and 'broken into' like her; when some survived the ordeal, some others did not, like Sangsoo. All the corpses of the dead girls were buried together under an unmarked grave and their family would never know what happened to them. Even in the post-war world the atrocities continued. If earlier it was just the Japanese, in the post-war period it was the Americans and the Russians.

The majority of the girls who were taken away did not return, but even if they did the nation looked at them with shame and revulsion for having survived the ordeal. The comfort women who returned were shunned and segregated from mainstream society, hence they had to live in isolation. The Japanese never acknowledged the wartime crimes it committed on the Korean citizens, especially with regard to the issue of the 'comfort women'. It was through Kim Hak-Sun that the world first came to know about the experiences of the comfort woman and from then on the others came up. Korea was constantly facing calamities one after the other with a change in power, changes of administration and between that the country was getting rebuilt from its ashes. But, "the defeated were prohibited from acknowledging the persecution and reprisals, the cleansing and cruelty that the victors—with impunity—waged

upon them” (Stanley 2022, p.139). Whether it is the Japanese, Americans or the Russians, they all focused on looting and making changes for their own advantage.

The Japanese citizens themselves were victims of the ravages of war and the cruelties of their own countrymen. However, they were also victims of the perceptions and discriminations imposed on them by the west. *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden received widespread criticism as it provided a tainted portrayal of the flower and willow world and its narrator, Mineko Iwasaki. Anne Allison argued that, “Golden’s portrayal of a geisha world is totally different from the one she gave him. In his hands, it is more tawdry and smutty than cultured and refined; the book is a “potboiler” where geisha appear as prostitutes – more fantasy of Western men than an accurate representation of Japanese Geisha” (Allison, 2002, p.389-391). For Iwasaki, the betrayal came in the form of inappropriate portrayal of her life, the tarnished reputation of the Geisha culture and the discussion of intimate details that were discussed, which compromised her position in society. As a result, Mineko Iwasaki released her own version of the memoir titled, *Geisha, A Life in the US* or *Geisha of Gion* in the UK. Being the main source for Golden’s novel, Iwasaki was already established, so when she published her own memoir written from her own perspective, it generated a stir among the audience. Iwasaki writing her own memoir was an act of ‘writing back’ and creating a narrative that was not according to the perceptions or ‘gaze’ of the West.

Mineko Iwasaki takes matters into her own hands when she is presenting her memoir from her own perspective. By publishing her own memoir, Iwasaki refutes the claims made by Golden and at the same time questions his narrative. Geishas represent the culture and heritage of Japan; hence it has a longstanding reputation in Japanese society as well as in the West for the “Japaneseness” (p.15) it represents. After the publication of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, as well as during the nineteenth century, the perception of the term ‘Geisha’ changed from paragon of arts to an object of beauty and sex, in the Western minds. The movies and novels started endorsing this symbol to a great extent instead of being perceptive of what the term ‘Geisha’ represented. Iwasaki’s novel questions and negates the perception of the Western world by rewriting her story. By using the same tools of language and discourse used by the Western world, she presents her life and ethnography of Japan in its truest form. For her, the act of writing back to the centre is her way of claiming back her identity and also protecting the culture or world she belongs to. When Golden presents the book, he is restricted by the limits and ability to represent the Japanese society as it is, because he is an outsider observing the Japanese culture, hence his representation also gets influenced by the culture from which he belongs to. But in Iwasaki’s case she is an insider and hence she becomes a ‘cultural native’ (p.16) questioning the perceptions of the west and at the same time correcting it, in order to provide the proper narrative.

The three works discussed in the paper provide a concrete analogy of how they represent a counter perspective and how the centre always turns its back on the stories of women. These texts are the indications of how the ignored narratives of women provide more

information about the ground reality. Rather than seeing women as reserved to the private quarters, the angle the novels presented of women were as the victims of war and the witnesses of the wartime cruelties. When the majority of the men perished during war or were at the war front, it's the women at home who saw what their community and country went through. Looking through the perspective of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffins's words, the authors of the three selected texts are abrogating and appropriating the language of the colonisers in order to convey the stories. They appropriate the language, reject the Western ideals and question the narratives of the colonisers, but at the same time colour it their own. By creating and propagating the narrative of the 'Other', the stories are transmitted worldwide and by using the language of the coloniser, makes it a site of resistance. Through this, the silenced voices get a chance to validate their experiences within their community and the outsiders become spectators for the performance of reconstruction of the authentic experiences.

Conclusion

The significance of historical memory showcased here in the paper is very clear, when looked through the perspective of community fiction and gynocentric narratives. These perspectives try to bring out the collective memory of the community that is stored deep inside their cultural memory. By analysing the selected texts, it is clear that the testimonials dig deep into the memory of the community and its victims in order to provide justice for them. The different voices from the selected texts pays homage to the collective sufferings of the community members, this is so because in their fight for survival the victims chose to remain silent or their voices were silenced by the people in power. So through the fictionalised accounts of the incidents the communities find voice, which is also an act of regaining their agency as well as establishing their selfhood.

As a community narrative, the texts become records of the collective community experiences, thereby giving legitimacy to the same. The experiences mentioned by the authors in the texts were based on the direct experiences accumulated by them through interviews with the victims. Majority of the writing incorporated into it, the activities of daily life of the community including its practices, chores, lifestyle and customs through which they nurtured the sense of communityhood in the readers. These experiences became an example of the collective memory of the community based on which the texts were structured. Therefore, the authors reconstruct it in their works and making it a written record, though fictionalised. Reading through the community narratives, the readers get to live through the experiences of the community as a whole through the characters. The geishas, hanyeos and Zainichi Koreans come out of the pages and become real people who narrate their life stories to the readers directly. By evoking sympathy in the readers, the authors help in acknowledging the past and providing a platform for change.

Similarly, by using the idea of femimemory and gynocentric narration the authors present the problem of gender binary that exists in society irrespective of the people in power.

Being the head of the family, Yoseb doesn't want Kyunghye or Sunja to work because he believes it's the man's job and considers them foolish. But Hansu on the other hand respects Sunja by giving her autonomy over her own life. The authors also present the gender disparity and sexualisation that the women experienced in the Korean and Japanese society of those times, which was deeply embedded in their minds. Through femimemory, the novels try to reclaim the lost glory of the community and the gendered omissions of memory by making their voices heard for generations to come. By questioning the official accounts, the gynocentric narratives allude to how the narratives are all masculine, which promptly ignores or omits the feminine versions. In the face of oblivion, retelling the tales from femimemory is an act of resistance and an attempt at creating a just world.

In the face of the calamities that the people went through, the firm source of support and comfort came from interdependency among the communities. So community life is an integral part of an individual's life because of the support and fortitude that they gather from the members during calamities in their lives is undeniable. For the Zainichi Korean communities in Japan, it is the organisations formed by their own community members like Mindan and Chongryun organisations that were finally able to make their situations better. The organisations provided its community members with facilities like schools, banks, working places, and many other facilities which were finally able to save the community members from its downfall. Similarly, the hanyeo collective is not just a professional group, but a sisterhood which is a very close knit community. When together they share their sorrows, happiness, and even help each other out when they have problems. It is a sisterhood that exists far beyond the depths of the sea and the members are more close with each other than with their family members. It is a bond that blooms from keeping an eye out for each other under the sea and a mutual trust that is gathered by working together under dangerous situations. In the same way, geishas also have a similar bond with the Okiya members even though they are not actually related by blood. Once a member of the Okiya, the children are considered a part of the family. It is again a sisterhood where all the women work together for the prosperity and improvement of the Okiya as well as its members. They protect, pamper, love, cherish and support each other in such a manner, that the Okiya gradually becomes their own home.

Even though each community has its own limitations and problems, nobody can better understand each other than its members. Beyond the hurdles of class, race, and income these communities are successful in protecting, preserving and taking care of the needs of its members. The gynocentric narrations presented in the texts also honour the communal values and cultural ethics of the different communities presented in the selected texts. Discussion on community narratives, gynocentric narration and femimemory opens up important avenues for further research within the paper. The perspectives and junctures it opens provides scope for more research based on community, counter narratives and history.

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