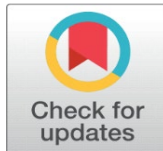


NAVIGATING IDENTITY AND CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SPIRITED AWAY AND A TERRIBLE MATRIARCHY

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to analyze, explore and compare the two completely different stories of *Spirited Away* by Hayao Miyazaki and *A Terrible Matriarchy* by Easterine Kire. The cultural, thematic, narrative and the world view of the child of both works will provide the thematic framework of this study. Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* occurs in a completely realm of its own, the world supernatural and spirits while the events of Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* takes place in a regular and traditional setting of a Naga society. Even though both stories take place in a completely different world and realm, they have uncanny resemblance in terms of literary perspective. The study seeks to establish a bridge connecting these two works by establishing a fresh perspective by understanding both cultures, their outlook towards life and its presentation in their works.

Keywords: Angami, Naga, Shinto, Yokai

1. INTRODUCTION

The study aims to compare and contrast the two completely different works of Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001) and Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007). *Spirited Away* by Hayao Miyazaki takes place in a fantastical and supernatural world in a Japanese setting. The protagonist of the story is a ten year old child named Chihiro, who is *isekaied* (spirited away in Japanese) into a magical world, trying to save her parents from a witch's curse. The plot follows the adventures of Chihiro trying to explore the world of unknown and overcoming

overbearing obstacles transforming her into a more mature child. However the incident of Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* occurs in a traditional Angami household in a Naga society. Similarly the protagonist of the story is a four year old girl Delieno who is robbed of her childhood life and is dragged into the world of harsh reality devoid of playfulness and joy. Delieno navigates the harsh and uncertain nature of the new world in which she is exposed to, prevailing the hurdles set by the society. The main objective the study is to analyse the similarities of the plot, structure and themes linking both works from a literacy perspective. This study will also examine the two works from the perspective of children's literature displaying the cultural, cross-cultural, and religious elements to understand and promote cultural awareness among children.

2. PARALLEL NARRATOLOGY: THE EXPLORATION OF COMMON THREADS

Spirited Away and *A Terrible Matriarchy* both follow a bildungsroman approach in their story telling narrative. Both stories focus on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist, involves tracing the character's development throughout their experiences and challenges resulting in their maturation and self discovery. *Spirited Away* and *A Terrible Matriarchy* present a set of immature and naive children both unaware of the real world. As the story unfolds, the protagonists encounter various obstacles and conflicts which turn them into a responsible and self-assured individual. In *Spirited Away* we are introduced to our protagonist Chihiro who is a ten year old girl, who undergoes significant growth and development throughout her journey. From being a timid girl she evolves into a brave and compassionate young woman. At the start Chihiro is portrayed as a spoiled, grump and whiny child. She shows resistance and refuses to obey her parents when they decide to explore an abandoned amusement park which ultimately transports them into the world of spirits. Upon entrance, Chihiro is overwhelmed and frightened by the sight of the strange world. She begs her parents to return home saying "Let's just get out of here" (13). Soon Chihiro's parents are cursed and turned into pigs for eating the food in the land of spirits without permission. Chihiro traverses in to the city of spirits in order to find help to undo the curse. Initially she is intimidated by the presence of strange and weirdly shaped spirits. She meets Haku, a river spirit who guides her to the bathhouse and advises her to work for Yubaba if she wanted to survive in the realm of the spirits. As the story begins to unfold the character of Chihiro also begins to develop. She is forced to face numerous challenges which demonstrate her resilience. One of the turning points in the story is when Chihiro signs a contract with Yubaba and gives up her name for 'Sen'. Even though Chihiro loses her identity, she still remains resilient and decides to break free from the witch's control. Despite giving her name, Chihiro clings to her old memories staying strong to herself even in the face of adversity. She retains her real identity developing self confidence in her ability to tackle any situation. Throughout her encounters with various spirits and bathhouse workers, Chihiro befriends Lin, an employee at the bath house. She also learns the value of kindness and compassion during her stay in the bathhouse. Chihiro demonstrates her great compassion when she aids No-Face, a misunderstood spirit. She recognizes her loneliness and treats the spirit with kindness, eventually helping the spirit find its true purpose. By the end of the story Chihiro breaks the curse on her parents and saves them. The adventure in the spirited world completely transformed the character of the Chihiro. From a frightened and insecure child she

turned into a strong, brave, confident and a compassionate person who displays maturity and independence.

Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* narrates the saga of the protagonist Dielieno from her childhood till adulthood. Dielieno who is a four and half year old girl is suddenly sent away from her parents in order to live with her grandmother so that she can become a real woman. Dielieno is robbed of her caring and nurturing world provided by her family. She is sent to live with Vibano, who is the matriarch of the house. The environment of the new house is a completely different world for the four year old protagonist. Instead of living a carefree and happy life, Dielieno lives a dreaded life working from the dawn till dusk. In the beginning when Dielieno arrives at grandmother's house, she is apprehensive and immature kid. She startles and chokes at every task given by her grandmother. She is denied of any free time and is forced to work all the time. Grandmother would often hit her sometimes when she commits any mistake. Dielieno would often cry and wishes for her grandmother to be dead. However Dielieno despite being outspoken and oppressed by her grandmother doesn't allow herself to be submerged into the void. For instance when her grandmother disapproved of her studies, Dielieno stands for her rights. Despite going to school, grandmother makes Dielieno's life absolutely overbearing by adding lots of chores alongside her studies. In spite all the attempts to make Dielieno drop out of school, she persist, overcoming all the unfavourable outcomes. Gradually as time passes Dielieno becomes more confident and optimistic about her life. After learning the landscape of her grandmother's house, Dielieno learns to navigate through the daily routine of the harsh life with an optimistic view. She learns about her grandmother's loneliness and starts to treat her with kindness and compassion. Dielieno learns to balance her chores alongside her academics, eventually passing her matriculation exam and later joins college despite her grandmother's disapproval. By the end Dielieno becomes a free individual and takes the reader through the journey of a girl from adolescence to maturity, triumphing over her fears and establishing herself as an independent and free individual.

3. DUAL CULTURAL REPRESENTATION: NAVIGATING THE SIMILARITIES

Both works of Easterine Kire and Hayao Miyazaki are based on their respective culture. *Spirited Away* by Hayao Miyazaki presents a rich and cultural display of Japanese culture and tradition. *Spirited Away* perfectly encapsulates the elements of Japanese oral culture, tradition, religion, and superstition. All these cultural elements contribute to the overall authenticity of the work. The work of *Spirited Away* takes a lot of inspiration from both ancient and modern elements of Japanese culture. For instance the bathhouse in which Chihiro works is known as "Yokai Socho" which is a prominent element in *Spirited Away*. It is inspired by the traditional Japanese bathhouses known as sento or onsen. These places hold a great significance in Japanese culture as they are regarded not only as a place for relaxation but also a place for social gathering for the Japanese people in general. An important cultural element displayed in *Spirited Away* is the portrayal of spirits and supernatural elements called "yokai". This belief is derived from the religious belief of Shinto culture of Japan which believes in the existence of the supernatural. These spirits and Yokai are an essential part of Japanese folklore and mythology. Miyazaki meticulously depicts these spirits throughout the story in different shape sizes and forms like appa, radish and soot spirits. According to the Shintoism spiritual power exists in the natural world and one should respect and homage to the spirits. This is demonstrated through the examples of Chihiro and her parents. Chihiro's parents

are punished for disrespecting the spirits while Chihiro herself is rewarded for purity, for choosing spirituality over materialism. The concept of amiaushi is a central element to the plot of *Spirited Away*. It refers to the when a person disappears or is taken away by spirits to their realm this ancient belief is deeply ingrained in Japanese folklore and brings a mystical elements to the plot of *Spirited Away*. Zen Gardens known as aresansui is also portrayed in the story which is characterized by carefully arranging rocks, gravel and moss. They are associated with Zen Buddhism and are now for their peaceful and meditative ambiance. *Spirited Away* also emphasizes the importance of respect and etiquette, which are essential values in Japanese society. This is displayed through the protagonist Chihiro as she navigates the spirit world and learns to show proper respect to the elders and the spirits. These cultural and traditional elements reinforce Japanese identity and offer glimpses into the country's rich heritage. They add depth and authenticity to the cultural elements. It also contributes to its universal appeal, allowing children all around the globe to appreciate and experience Japanese culture. On the other hand *A Terrible Matriarchy* by Kire is also a work filled with cultural elements from the Naga society. The events of the story take place in a traditional setting in Kohima in the early 1970's. At the very start of the novel, we see cultural and traditional Naga elements. Dielieno is refused to be given the leg portion of chicken as it is reserved for the boys due to patriarchal practice. Even the name Dielieno is a Angami term for "errand girl" as the purpose of the girl is to run errands and look after the family. Typical Naga practices like manual labour for boys and household chore for girls is displayed in the story. The practice of smoking and drying meat in order to preserve it for later consumption is also seen in the story. The customary of land inheritance is also displayed in the story. The lands are not only a piece of place to stay but are family's lineage passed generation after generation. These ancestral lands are inherited by the males. The predominant Christian society is portrayed with grandmother taking Dielieno to church and reading out bible verses. The belief of supernatural and superstitions is also present despite the addition of Christianity in the Naga society indicating the touch of ancestral ways despite the events of post-colonialism. Some other etiquette in Angami society is also presented throughout the story like how to address the elders, when to speak, the role of kinship in Naga society and the role of families. These cultural and traditional elements help children learn about specific society and appreciate them. It provides an opportunity to children to explore different culture and building respect for it. It promotes inclusivity and help children build a sense of belonging. By witnessing characters from diverse backgrounds, children can develop empathy, tolerance and a broad understanding of the world. It teaches them to appreciate and accept differences, fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society.

4. THE TRANSITION FROM GIRL INTO WOMANHOOD IN TWO DIFFERENT REALMS

The story of *Spirited Away* and *A Terrible Matriarchy* can also be analysed from the lens of feminism. Both stories occur in a patriarchal society where women are deprived of opportunities and free will. This is evident as both Japanese and Naga society are dominated by men and the only role of women is to look after the household. However both texts empower the identity of women as an individual and portray strong female character that refuses to be crushed by the societal norms. Miyazaki's works have been celebrated for his strong female characters and the way they challenge traditional gender roles. In *Spirited Away*, the protagonist Chihiro finds herself trapped in a mysterious world and has to navigate through several

challenges to save her parents. Throughout her journey, she undergoes personal growth, becoming more assertive and courageous. The work portrays women and girls as powerful and capable individuals who can overcome obstacles and assert their agency in a patriarchal society. *Spirited Away* explores Chihiro's journey towards self-discovery and independence. She starts off as a timid and insecure character but gradually transforms into a strong and confident individual, taking charge of her own destiny. This sends a powerful message about female empowerment and the idea that girls can overcome challenges and grow on their own terms. Chihiro's growth throughout the film can be seen as a feminist journey. As she faces challenges and overcomes them, she grows more confident and develops agency. This transformation represents a girl's journey towards self-discovery and independence, challenging the notion that girls are passive and need saving. In many traditional fairy tales, female characters are often portrayed as damsels in distress, waiting to be rescued by a male hero. In *Spirited Away*, Chihiro takes control of her own rescue mission and saves her parents by working hard while using her wit and courage. This subversion of the damsel in distress trope challenges traditional gender roles and reinforces the idea that women can be capable and take charge of their own lives. Throughout the story, we see several strong and influential female characters, such as Zeniba, Yubaba, and Lin. These characters possess power, wisdom, and agency, playing important roles in Chihiro's journey and influencing her transformation. Their presence showcases the diversity and strength of women in the narrative. *Spirited Away* subtly critiques gender stereotypes prevalent in society. It portrays characters like Yubaba and Zeniba, who are powerful witches, challenging the notion that women cannot hold positions of authority or power. The story of *Spirited Away* also explores themes of motherhood, highlighting the complex and nurturing characteristics associated with femininity. *Spirited Away* showcases a feminist perspective by celebrating female agency, autonomy, and challenging traditional gender norms, making it a compelling and empowering work for young audiences. *A Terrible Matriarchy* is coming age story of a little five year old girl named Dielieno and her confrontation towards the patriarchal Naga Society. Kire through her character brings out the oppression of women in the traditional Naga society. The concept of male being the bread earner, the hunter, the protector and the head of the family and women as house keeper is clearly established early into the story. Thus the status of women in the society remains stagnant. The novel revolves around Dielieno's life and describes her journey from childhood till adulthood. At the age of five she is forced to leave her house and stay at her grandmother's house in order to become an ideal woman. Dielieno's childhood joy is robbed and is relegated to the four corners of the house doing household chore. The image of an "ideal women" forces the little girl to give up her identity in order to fit in society. However Dielieno revolts against the traditional norms. Dielieno refuses to be oppressed and tamed by the patriarchal system. She stands up for her rights and intervenes whenever her freedom and identity is at risk. For instance when grandmother tries to stop Dielieno education as it would distract her from her chores, she promises to keep up her studies alongside her household chores. She balances her work and studies by waking at the crack of dawn. She gets promoted to higher class due to her hard work and perseverance. She passes her matriculate exam and works as a teacher supporting herself. She overcomes her fear and failures by simply ignoring to the naysayers. Dielieno learns to navigate through the world of adulthood from an early age where most five year old girl will submit themselves to the norms of the society. Dielieno rises against the patriarchal system not as a feminist but as someone who claims her rightful rights. Even though Dielieno was made to feel inferior compared to her

brothers, she didn't let it drag her away from her goals and aspiration. Delieno presents the status and social condition of women in Naga society but she also encourages women to come out of their comfort zone and embrace freedom and individuality. These stories offer girls role models and a motivation to dismantle gender biases. This kind of narrative helps shape a more inclusive and equitable society. Through these feminist stories, girls can learn to question societal norms, challenge stereotype and envision a world where their voices and choices are valued. It helps them embrace their uniqueness, challenge limitation and strive for aspiration, fostering confidence, self worth and a sense of empowerment. By reading such stories children receive valuable life lessons, shaping them into an open minded, confident individuals who appreciate diversity and strive for a more inclusive society.

5. CONCLUSION

A comparative analysis between Miyazai and Kire showed us a lot of similarities in terms of narratology, thematic ideas, cultural presentation and motif of the writings. Both writers delved heavily into their local culture and beliefs to highlight their works. This deep dive into the local culture makes the readers aware of cultural awareness, difference and similarities. These cultural and traditional elements also help readers learn about specific society and appreciate them. we can also both writers challenge gender norms by employing complex and independent female characters that takes up the role of masculinity yet still embracing femininity. Moreover the addition of empathy to these characters creates more depth characters. This depth in character allows for a more realistic approach which allows readers to connect with these characters throughout their journey.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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