

BIASED REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN HARUKI MURAKAMI'S SHORT STORIES

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a tool that reflects how a society functions at a point in time. While the indication of the author may not be direct, it often shows how each subsection, based on gender, religion, race, etc., is seen by the general population. Women, who make up almost half the population of the world, have often been misrepresented through literature. As evidenced by the series of books popular in the early phase of English literature, mostly men had the rights and resources to create literature. Therefore, while male characters carry the depth in their personality, female characters are often depicted as stereotypes to carry out the plot. This is not limited to only British literature, as the instances of unfaithful representation of women can also be seen in the early Japanese text. As more and more female authors began to rise, better female characters with nuance are becoming a part of literature. However, the trend of depicting women characters as a plot device still continues. By taking Haruki Murakami's work, this paper will focus on how female characters are created without depth and reasonable voice. It will also analyse how the same circumstances are showcased for each gender under varying light, in which, one is villainised while the other is not.

KEYWORDS: Biased representation, English literature, female characters, Haruki Murakami, Japanese culture.

I. INTRODUCTION

Literary works are a mirror to society while becoming a medium to voice issues and concerns that often plague them. An important part of any fictitious literary work is its characters. A

character, generally the protagonist, conveys the thoughts and ideas prevalent during the time and speaks the truth that would otherwise be controversial. However, it is important to note that biases and notions held by a writer can often play a powerful role in constructing a fictional character. Since the development of the English language in the 14th century, male authors have occupied a significant portion of English literature in which they have been active extensively. Up until the idea of female authors became acceptable and popular, the construction of fictional women lay in the hands of men. Virginia Woolf's fictional character, Judith Shakespeare, in *A Room of One's Own*, gives a glimpse of how various factors have prevented women from pursuing literature. Likewise, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their work *Madwomen In The Attic*, state that men, throughout history, have associated pen with paternity while claiming that writing was 'unnatural' for women. With this narrative of women being incapable writers, the characterisations of women were heavily controlled by men.

“If male sexuality is integrally associated with the assertive presence of literary power, female sexuality is associated with the absence of such power...” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 8)

As chivalry romance became popular in the medieval age, women, often love interests, had common characteristics, like beautiful, fragile, righteous, and faithful. They would be accompanied by knights who would prove their love by fulfilling a quest, after which a woman would marry a knight. In contrast, another archetype would be the witch or a whore, who would deceive the knight through magic or seduction. Unlike the love interest, these women would not depend on knights for their safety and would transcend social boundaries. Trickster was another type who would navigate her life by bending the rules of society through deceit. This type, like the Wife of Bath in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, is cunning and manipulative and would oversmart men to gain control of their lives. Regardless, all these characters often lacked depth and would either glorify or make readers sympathise with the man. This trend continued in the golden age of English literature, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. While Shakespeare's plays had strong female characters, in order to take a bold step, they often had to cross-dress as men, like Portia in *Merchant of Venice* or Rosalind in *As You Like It*. Nevertheless, these women were still bound by the 'virgin' archetype who had to follow certain social norms to 'deserve' a happy ending. Meanwhile, characters like Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew* were subjected to constant ridicule to suppress her stubborn

personality, replacing it with becoming dutiful wives. This trend continues despite the appearance of female writers, as these archetypes were popular and acceptable to the majority of the audience.

A shift can be observed in the 19th century when female novelists took the lead in creating complex storylines and characters. While the plot would revolve around domestic settings and issues, the female characters had more depth as readers could see and understand the story from their perspective. Again, a distinction between male and female authors can be drawn from the fact that male writers would often focus more on the tragedy surrounding a woman than the woman herself. For instance, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* shows the hypocritical treatment of Victorian society against women; though the story revolves around what happens with Tess, not with how Tess feels. It is important to note that the instance of the 'angel' and 'monster' archetype is still present in popular literary works of the Victorian age, like Amy Dorrit in *Little Dorrit* by Charles Dickens. When English as a language was learned and adopted by different colonies of Britain and other nations, it also became a ground to compare cultures and traditions and, subsequently, works of literature of two varying societies. Unlike India, English education in Japan started as a mode of defence.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since 1639, Dutch had been the transnational language that the Japanese relied on to study medical sciences. When the HMS Phaeton, a royal navy ship of Britain, landed on the shores of Nagasaki harbour in 1808, Edo Shogunate (Military General of Japan) ordered Dutch scholars to learn English and Russian for the country's defence. Later, in 1848, they captured an American prisoner named Ranald MacDonal, through whom 14 translators chose to learn correct pronunciations and translations in English. Soon, two branches of English emerged in Japan: the irregular version (often taught by Japanese teachers) stressed more on reading and comprehending, while the regular version (taught by Americans and missionaries) emphasised correct pronunciation. By the early 20th century, the rise in nationalism in Japan and unfavourable immigration laws for Japanese citizens in the USA made the English language an unpopular choice in Japan.

Yet, this period was short-lived, as after World War II, people began to see practicality in learning English as it became a global language. With TV programs like *Come Come English*

by Nippon HosoKyokai, the importance of English was highlighted, which led to the language becoming an important part of the schools' and universities' curriculum. While there were a few momentary shifts in the late 1980s, the Japanese government in the 21st century is actively promoting cultural pluralism. While it is evident that Japan, like many Asian countries, has closely held onto its cultural identity, the biased representation of women in English literature and Japanese literature is vaguely similar.

The Tale of Genji by Murasaki Shikibu, written in the early 11th century, describes the life of King Genji and gives the reader an insight into early aristocratic Japan. Murasaki Shikibu was the lady-in-waiting to Empress Shōshi at the Imperial Heian Court. Being one of the earliest female writers, Shikibu gives a vivid picture of the gender roles and societal expectations of Japanese society. For instance, one of the important attributes of desirable women at the time was gentleness and forgiveness. Shikibu states men often prefer a wife who would be forgiving and patient if they commit adultery. While female authors have been more actively present in Japanese literature as compared to English, they have often struggled to represent their own gender. *The Makioka Sisters* by Jun'ichiro Tanizaki discusses how illegitimate heirs had more rights than legitimate daughters over their father's property. The trend of glorifying women as young, beautiful, and obedient caregivers continued by male and female authors up until World War II. By the 1900s, a group of feminists emerged in Japan who gave the concept of New Women and Modern Girl, where women would take control of their own bodies and join a path towards financial freedom. Since many women lost their husbands, fathers, or male caretakers, they actively took on more roles that were different from the traditional Meiji system. They protested against the practice of comfort women, where marginalised women (often prisoners) were forced into prostitution to satisfy soldiers' needs. With the new constitution in place in May 1947, women regained their civil rights.

In the late 20th century, fiction and non-fiction works started highlighting the hardships and struggles of women during the war. The second wave of feminism hit Japan during the Vietnam War when a group of women stood against war and the US-Japan Security Treaty. Its focus was not only on women's empowerment but also on creating an environmentally-conscious, cleaner Japan. During this age, female characters, especially written by women, would come from various economic backgrounds hoping to become professional women while may or may not experience love, marriage, or divorce. Characters like Mrs Ota in *Thousand*

Cranes by Yasunari Kawabata show the perspective of an older woman, which can be seen as a major shift from the previous trend. Likewise, Sawako Ariyos's *The Twilight Year* addresses the burden placed on modern women like Akiko to look after elderly members of the family, who belittle working women while struggling to survive in a workplace primarily dominated by men. These characters, primarily written by women, often close the gap between social reality in Japanese society and pseudo-reality created by male authors.

Unfortunately, the gender gap in the literature is not limited to Japan. As per a study done by the University of Rochester, from 2008 to 2019, only 35 out of 225 Japanese novels that were translated into English in the US were written by women. With 13 out of 23 Akutagawa Prize winners as women in 2010, female authors in Japanese literature have become popular and have received multiple recognition with time. However, the publishing industry's bias towards them results in a lack of opportunity, which in turn keeps them under low profit margins. Without proper representation of their own gender, the responsibility of sharing their stories falls on male authors. Therefore, it is important for popular authors to stick to true representations of their culture that a reader can only experience through their books. Haruki Murakami has built a name for himself in Japanese and English novels with his popular works like *Norwegian Wood*, *Kafka on the Shore*, and *1Q84*, with 11.16 million copies sold. His novels often deal with characters trapped in a state of hopelessness as they navigate their daily lives in urban cities.

These characters and their problems are interweaved cleverly with pop cultural references that often sit well with contemporary audiences. Such characters are usually narrators in Murakami's short stories; otherwise, their perspective or story is presented by a close friend. His protagonists, often men, struggle with complex emotions, yet they navigate the world while maintaining a calm facade. In 1998, Murakami claimed in an interview about his novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* that after immigrating to the US, he found Japanese culture unfamiliar. This claim can also be backed up by his critics, who often state that his works only show the Westernised version of Japan. Some critics have also argued that while Murakami Man navigates an unfamiliar and fantastical world, women in his works rarely get enough lines or time to build genuine connections with readers.

While *IQ84 Trilogy* presents a strong female character, Aomame, she mourns the loss of other women and refers to them by their breasts. Likewise, she also becomes a victim of unwanted sex in dream, a plot that Murakami has also employed in *Kafka On The Shore* and *Killing Commendatore*. A typical role that these female characters serve is to help male characters escape their boredom through conversation, physical intimacy, or taking care of their house. Women written by Murakami often do emotional labour and liberate protagonists from their loneliness and misery. The inverse situation, where a man helps a woman with her problems, is yet to be seen in his works. Due to this, female characters often come across as flat characters who are present in the work to perform a specific task, lacking individualism. Male characters have complex temperaments that they exhibit in various ways. Such features make the Murakami Man mimic the crisis of a real-life person with whom his readers can relate.

Mieko Kawakami, a Japanese feminist and Akutagawa Prize winner, pointed out the sexual function of women to Haruki Murakami in his works during an interview in 2017. She states that female characters are still designed to sacrifice themselves for men in the story, a trait that can also be seen in Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's *The Makioka Sisters*, written in 1936. While Murakami defended that he did not individualise his characters based on gender, the recurring patterns are stacked against him. One of his recent works is *Men Without Women*, a collection of eight riveting stories that explore complex modern relationships, the loneliness of city life, and otherworldliness. Most of the stories are narrated by men and are about men who, in a way, have been lonely due to the loss or betrayal of a woman. Each story explores the crisis of such Murakami Man, whose life is turned around by women in either a positive or negative way.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- A. To study the depiction of female and male characters by Haruki Murakami.
- B. To study the differences between characters' depiction based on gender.
- C. Understanding how these biased representations create a negative perception of one gender.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper will focus on female characters in three out of eight stories in Murakami's collection: *Drive My Car*, *An Independent Organ*, and *Scheherazade*. The paper will do a qualitative

analysis where it will focus on how each character, who is struggling with their own life, is present in front of the audience. It will also examine the words or phrases that are used to describe each character in the story. The first story is about a middle-aged widower, Kafuku, who has hired Misaki as his driver as his glaucoma prevents him from driving. Despite his prejudices against female drivers, Kafuku starts to enjoy Misaki's company. With his daily small conversations, readers get a glimpse of Kafuku's unhealthy marriage, where his wife used to cheat on him with multiple men. In the end, Kafuku gets closure as he understands that his late wife's infidelity is not his fault.

This story is widely popular as it inspired a film of the same name that won the Best Screenplay Award at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival. The second story, *An Independent Organ*, is about Dr. Tokai, a bachelor who would often engage in intimate relationships with married women. However, this becomes his hamartia as he falls in love with one such woman who leaves him for another man. This story is narrated through a friend's perspective who is sympathetic yet slightly critical of Dr. Tokai. The last story is slightly different as it majorly revolves around the mysterious unnamed woman who is referred to as Scheherazade. Her storytelling enamours Habara, and he relies on her to shop for daily necessities as he cannot leave his apartment for unknown reasons. This story only explores the relationship between these two characters and their identities.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

In the first story, *Drive My Car*, Haruki Murakami uses third-person narration that follows Kafuku. The protagonist of this story has a strong opinion against women, which the readers are introduced in the first page. For instance, he divides female drivers into two categories: shy and aggressive. While he acknowledges that universally, women are mindful drivers, their extreme caution often makes them nervous or too careful in their driving. Likewise, aggressive women drivers would often look down upon nervous ones while taking pride that they are not like them. Kafuku further believes that while men can be bad drivers, they rarely make him uncomfortable as they do not fall into these categories. They can separate their driving from their personalities (nervous or aggressive) and can easily sail on the road.

“Certainly there were good and bad male drivers too...

Nevertheless, they seemed to be able to separate their tension and

who they were in a natural–likely unconscious–way.”

(Murakami, 2017, p. 4)

A similar line of thought can be seen in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwomen in the Attic*, where earlier authors like G.M. Hopkins and Robert Southey have stated that 'pen' or authority to write a creative text is an unnatural phenomenon for women. Kafuku, in a veiled sense, also paints women as unnatural (or bad) drivers by presenting them as too attentive and cautious; ironically, these traits are what makes a man a good driver. The woman (Misaki Watari) that Kafuku ends up hiring is a silent, simple, and plain lady who keeps to herself.

The initial introduction of characters is an important part of fiction as it sets the path on how readers will perceive them. When Kafuku is introduced to readers, they are informed about his strong opinion on female drivers, his eye conditions that make him rely on drivers and his attachment to his car. Murakami does not give heavy emphasis on Kafuku's clothes, hair, or body. In contrast, when Misaki is introduced to readers in a conversation between Kafuku and his mechanic Oba, she is described as a good driver but the focus is quickly brought towards her appearance. Oba describes her as homely, not too attractive and is a chain smoker. Likewise, when Misaki first appears, her physical description is presented in a negative light. For instance, she is described as "not fat at all but broad-shouldered and powerfully built" (Murakami, 2017, p. 8); she is not conscious about her purple birthmark that people can see on her neck; she has an off-putting face; she is "hardly a beauty".

Consequently, the first interaction between Kafuku and Misaki needs to be carefully examined; Kafuku avoided female drivers as they could pry into his personal life. Yet, while talking to Misaki for the first time, he finds her aloof demeanour icy and emotionless. While Kafuku continuously reminds himself (and readers) that he prefers Misaki's attitude, he never fails to compare her body or her habits with other women. For instance, he notices her heavy breasts despite her plain, rough clothes; he sees how she does not put an effort to look good by using cosmetics or accessories; or how she rarely comments on anything and only talks when spoken to. He is also the one to initiate conversations with Misaki and often wonders what she thinks of him as a person. In a way, Kafuku, who initially avoids women for being emotional, subconsciously seeks someone who can help him understand his own feelings. In a way,

Kafuku, like most Murakami Man, relies on a woman to help him with his self-imposed loneliness.

Murakami's works can be seen from the lens of new historicism as they reflect the prevalent social and cultural norms. New historicism deals with understanding a literary text within its historical timeframe and studying it with respect to its social, political and economic context. An important female character in this story is Kafuku's late wife, who used to be an actress. Through her initial introduction, Haruki Murakami highlights the gendered ageism in the entertainment industry; Kafuku's wife was a celebrated actress in her youth, while Kafuku was chosen only for supporting roles. However, as they grew older, his wife's stardom began to fade as she would often be replaced by younger actresses. On the other hand, Kafuku, who worked in theatres for as long as her wife, was revered as a skilled actor among directors and would get more and more opportunities to work. A reflection of this can be seen in the real world as the age gap between nominated men and women in the US Academy Awards for Best Actor in 2020 is 21.6 years. Likewise, women above age 30 receive 20% of leading roles, while men occupy up to 80%.

It is evident that skills are seen as secondary for women as their beauty becomes their primary selling point. As for men, the entertainment industry is more flexible as they can find or create new roles that are suitable according to men's age or physical appearance. Murakami goes into great depth to make readers understand Kafuku's life and his loneliness. Kafuku's wife was an unfaithful woman who had affairs with four different men before her death. While Kafuku knew about her affairs, he never confronted her due to his love for her wife. He often blamed himself for these affairs, stating his wife went outside to find comfort that he failed to provide. He also speculated that these affairs were distractions to escape the grief of the death of their infant.

Readers also see how Kafuku goes through many hoops to ensure that her wife remains comfortable. To understand his wife's infidelity, Kafuku goes as far as to befriend her last boyfriend, Takatsuki. However, he ends up sympathising with him as, like Kafuku, Takatsuki also mourns and misses his wife. These details help readers understand and justify Kafuku's initial demeanour and make him a well-rounded character. In contrast, Misaki's past is narrated in a blunt manner where her thought process and feelings are not very well depicted. Misaki

comes from a dysfunctional house where her mother, an alcoholic, blamed her for her husband's estrangement. However, this subject is not adequately explored by the author or protagonist, which creates a disconnect between Misaki and the readers. Her story is used as a plot device so that Kafuku can open up about his emotional dilemma to Misaki. When he voices his insecurities, Misaki comforts him by explaining that his wife might have chosen to be with Takatsuki as she did not love him – bringing the story to its final conclusion.

Another critical detail that can be observed is the biased representation of men and women as alcoholics. Misaki's mother was a heavy drinker who died during a car accident. She was emotionally abusive to her daughter after Misaki's father left them. She is a flat character whose grief, which led to her alcoholism, is not discussed. In contrast, Takatsuki, one of Kafuku's wife's affair, is also an alcoholic, but Kafuku sees that he drinks to escape the conflicts of his life. For instance, Takatsuki hoped to have a serious relationship with Kafuku's wife but could not convince her of that. Kafuku's wife ended their relationship when he confessed his desires to her. Later, he tells Kafuku that he is worried about not getting his seven-year-old child's custody in his divorce. When Kafuku peeks into Takasuki's life, he eventually decides to give up his revenge plan and walk away from him. These details act like justifications that explain to readers why Takatsuki finds comfort in alcohol. Therefore, Murakami's gendered treatment is also extended to his side characters.

The second story, *An Independent Organ*, talks about Dr. Tokai, a cosmetic plastic surgeon, who gives the concept of an independent organ that women possess. He states that women are born with a unique organ that allows them to lie in a perfect way. Their voice, tone, and expressions are in sync as if they believe their own lies. He also adds that this organ helps women live guilt-free lives, unlike men who are haunted by their subconsciousness. In contrast, men have another independent organ (as stated by the narrator, Mr. Tanimura), which allows them to deeply love and connect with women. While this concept in itself is sexist, the activities of Dr. Tokai make him duplicitous. For instance, he actively seeks married or committed women to have an affair. He is helped by his loyal assistant, who makes sure that their indiscretions are not caught. This story is narrated by Tokai's friend, Mr. Tanimura, who is recalling the story from his memory. Unlike the first story, dialogues of only three people (all men) are present.

The power dynamic in a story can often be decided by whose dialogues and descriptions are written in active voice. In this story, the authority to communicate and inform readers about Dr. Tokai's tragic end is given to his friend Tanimura and his assistant Goto. Both of them are loyal and good friends with Tokai and go as far as to hide or slide his mistakes. For instance, in the story, Goto often keeps a record of all women who are involved with Tokai, tracks their menstrual cycle and makes sure that none of the women knows about another unless it is necessary. Likewise, Tanimura, a married man, was rather fascinated by Tokai's life and never fails to glorify his intelligence in juggling his clinic and women. The woman, who can be considered a villain, is discussed by these characters in a passive voice; therefore, her portrayal can be biased, or her actual words can be distorted as per the speaker's own understanding and prejudices.

Dr. Tokai is introduced to readers as a 52-year-old bachelor who lives in an apartment in an elegant building, and his household is managed by a housekeeper. He runs a successful practice of cosmetic surgery and has maintained his appearance through a good diet and exercise. The woman Tokai falls in love with is described as a trap that catches a clever fox (Tokai). She is the mother of a five-year-old girl, and her husband works in an IT corporation outside Japan. No other detail is given about her in the story except when Tokai states that he had dated women who were far more beautiful and intelligent than her.

In the story, Dr. Tokai states that he never aimed for intimate relationships with women; it was rather a byproduct. He actually sought intimate intellectual connections with attractive women. As a doctor, he would have an affair with quick-witted, humorous women with whom he would have a quality experience. He also referred to women who would marry as they turn 30 or 40 as the calendars at the end of the year. Tokai respected the 'matrimony' but never failed to decline an offer to start an affair with a married woman. Likewise, he never saw the problem of being compliant in these affairs and assumed that it was natural for someone to have two-to-three partners simultaneously. This is a crucial detail to note as the woman who breaks Tokai's heart by leaving him for another man does nothing different than what Tokai used to do. The woman, whom Tokai loves, is married and has a five-year-old child. She enters into an intimate relationship with him while adhering to the original agreement to being casual. However, Tokai finds himself very attracted to her to the point that he cannot find any flaws in her looks or personality. He states that when he cannot see or talk to her, he feels intense rage

where he would want to wreck his house. While he states that his rage is never directed toward her but rather at his own inability to get out of this situation, it is yet another example of how he severely depends on her for his emotional comfort.

“...what scares me the most, and makes me the most confused, is the rage I feel inside me.” (Murakami, 2017, p. 98)

The woman (Tokai's lover) makes it clear that she has no intention of divorcing her husband as she does not want to break her family. Tokai is constantly worried that either she will get bored of him or leave him to avoid suspicion from her husband— leaving Tokai in utter despair. He later explains that she started her affair after discovering her husband's affair as revenge. Even in this situation, his friend does not try to persuade him to let go of his obsession or seek professional help; instead, the burden of his emotional stability is delegated to that unnamed woman who has to make the 'right' choice. Regardless, in the end, she leaves her husband and Tokai for another, younger man, which makes Tokai 'lovesick'.

He stopped eating and taking care of himself and, thus, reduced himself to nothing. Goto, Tokai's assistant, states that he contacted that woman when Tokai was on his deathbed, but she did not respond. He further explains to the narrator that she might be using Dr. Tokai for his money, as before his death, he took out an ample amount from his account. However, he assumes this based on Tokai's bank balances and credit cards, from which he withdrew money. It is unclear to Goto whether Tokai loaned the money to her or bought expensive gifts.

By the end of the story, the actions of Tokai are somewhat forgotten as he emerges as a faithful lover. The woman who left Tokai is showcased as cunning, selfish, and manipulative, who used him for her own gains. While the actions of both characters are wrong, one is glorified in the end, and the other is demonised. This hypocrisy can be seen by comparing this event with another one in the earlier part of the story. At the start of the story, Tokai mentions a married woman who was too attached to him. Due to this, he had to face trouble from her husband, who was a famous wrestler. He cuts contact with her to maintain his peace. While the reasons of the woman (who left Tokai) are not mentioned, her picture is presented in such a way that the reader has to assume the worst of it. Unlike Tokai, who defended his action of cutting ties with the earlier woman for his own peace, the latter woman cannot present her own

defence. Since the story is told by these three characters (Mr. Tanimura, Dr. Tokai and Goto), it is plausible that some details regarding this mysterious woman may be biased or fabricated.

The last story, *Scheherazade*, unlike the other stories, revolves around a woman. Habara and an unnamed woman who is his nurse have an affair in his apartment. A few details in the story are not mentioned, like why Habara cannot go outside his apartment or why he needs a nurse. The story starts on an abrupt note when Habara thinks about the nurse, whom he calls Scheherazade, which is a reference to Queen Scheherazade in *A Thousand and One Nights*, as she has a habit of telling strange and intriguing stories to Habara. In the story, the character of Scheherazade is explored from Habara's perspective, where he often stresses her importance in his life. She would visit him twice a week and bring groceries, arrange them in his fridge, and make a list of things that he might need.

Scheherazade is described as a 35-year-old, plain housewife who looks put together but is not very attractive. Murakami depicts her as a woman who is reaching middle age with "flab" or loose fat around her body and "jowls and lines" on her face. Habara, however, is not clearly described in the story. The only detail that readers can see about him is his full-grown beard. Habara also states that if she were younger, she would have been beautiful, but with age, it is unlikely to happen.

“Ten years earlier, she might well have been a lively and attractive young woman, perhaps turned a few heads. At some point, however, the curtain had fallen on that part of her life and it seemed unlikely to rise again.” (Murakami, 2017, p. 116)

When a character creates a link between beauty and age, it often re-enforces gendered ageism, which has real-life implications in the world. For instance, older people are less likely to be hired in Japan as they are often stereotyped as inflexible and rigid, and these discriminations are also gendered as they start early for women. While literature has created a safe space for men to be accepted in both their youth and old ages, same cannot be held true for women. Susan Sontag, an American author, correctly states that a second standard for women should be created, which separates them from being depicted as young girls since it punishes them as they have wrinkles, grey hair, or saggy skin.

“The discomfort a woman feels each time she tells her age is quite independent of the anxious awareness of human mortality that everyone has, from time to time.” (Sontag, 1997, p. 19)

Scheherazade is depicted as a mysterious and strange woman who believes in past lives and views the world differently. She states that in her former life, she was a lamprey eel. She goes into detail about how lamprey eels look, eat, or live. She states that when she was on an elementary school class trip, she saw a lamprey eel for the first time, which made her realise that she was one in her previous life. As per her understanding, a person can only get a glimpse of their past lives; they cannot recall them like a memory. Habara is fascinated by her stories as she sees a bleak world from a very colourful perspective. Unlike previous women discussed in this paper, Scheherazade has many dialogues through which she freely discusses multiple subjects without anyone's judgment. However, most of her thoughts and feelings, unlike Habara, are lacking in Murakami's narration. As readers go through the story, they hear the voice of Habara (for whom Murakami uses the active voice), who tries to decode Scheherazade. She is presented to readers as a subject of curiosity rather than a person who has her own life and story.

In a sense, readers can only understand Scheherazade from her stories and conversations with Habara, to whom she provides comfort. The only time readers can feel connected to her is when she recalls her memories, where her narration is free from Habara's.

The circumstances of Habara are different from Kafuku and Tokai as he is forced to live in isolation for his own safety. Nevertheless, his emotional and physical reliance on the nurse mirrors the rest of the Murakami man. The relationship between Habara and the nurse also mimics that of Queen Scheherazade and King Shahryar, where, like the King, the nurse keeps Habara hooked on her stories and often introduces a preview of the next one at the end. In the original tales, King Shahryar held the authority over the Queen's life, and to escape her fate, Scheherazade employed the art of telling stories in a frame narrative. Likewise, Murakami's Scheherazade also keeps a loop of stories that Habara is eager to hear. For instance, she talks about an incident she did in high school. She broke into the house of a boy she liked and went through his belongings like his bookshelf, clothes, stationeries, and more.

In his house, she would take something that belonged to him (like his pencil or shirt) and, in exchange, would keep something of her (like a tampon). She called herself the love burglar who would go to such lengths. However, this trespassing ended when the locks of his house were changed. But she hooks Habara by stating that she met him again during her second year of nursing. Through this, Habara, like King Shahryar, eagerly anticipates her next visit so that she can complete her story.

Likewise, sexual intimacy and storytelling are closely related. Scheherazade rarely talks about her private life or asks Habara about his past. Instead, they only form a connection through stories where she narrates and Habara comments like an attentive listener. For example, the young Scheherazade felt jealous as she imagined the boy's mother had access to his room and would do his chores, like folding clothes. Here, this jealousy can stem from the fact that she is hesitant to approach the boy and confess her feelings. This one-sided 'love' or obsession makes her a stalker who would break into the house to the point that she starts daydreaming in classes, thus, falling behind her studies.

Also, while retelling her story of break-ins, Scheherazade is so engrossed in her narration that she and Habara engage in passionate intercourse, which is unusual to their regular affairs. It is only this time that she breaks the protocol and uses his actual name. While Murakami explores Scheherazade's character, the lack of an actual name and his focus on her sex appeal does not give her the depth of Dr. Tokai or Kafuku.

VI. CONCLUSION

A writer creates characters based on how they see the world; in a way, it can also be an unconscious process. The culture and the literature that they have read will have a strong influence on their literary work. The female representation in literature has been heavily controlled and censored by men (and women) for ages. This is applicable to different cultures, irrespective of language or beliefs. While one may think that women writers would portray their gender accurately, such was not always the case. In order to be seen and accepted, earlier female writers had to imitate and adapt the writing techniques of contemporary male writers since the rules of literature were set by them. Unlike English literature, Japanese culture has had female authors for a very long time, yet their works have often appeased the gender roles

set by men. Authors, like Murasaki Shikibu, are another example of how patriarchal ideology was ingrained in the literature to the point that female authors would write what they considered to be their own opinion but was what patriarchal society wanted them to write.

With the emergence of the feminist movement across cultures, female authors, characters, and experiences are being highlighted and showcased in various genres of literature. After gaining considerable civil rights during the post-World War years, stories of powerful and complex female characters arose in Japanese literature. While many authors are making a conscious effort to give a true depiction of women and other marginalised communities in their works, the negative connotations and stereotypes attached to female characters, like Misaki or Scheherazade, are yet too common in 21st-century literature. No doubt, the social and cultural norms of Japan and the US have heavily influenced the characters in Haruki Murakami's stories. While male characters are ordinary men who are plagued by loneliness and act disinterested, women are unnecessarily diminished to an object that is present in the story to fulfil the needs of the protagonist. In a way, these women fit into the modernised version of already established archetypes: Misaki is a 'virgin' archetype who provides comfort to lost Kafuku; Unnamed woman in Tokai's story is a 'trickster' who uses Tokai as per her convenience; and Scheherazade is 'witch' who enamoured and controlled Habara's mind.

Proper depiction of genders matters as literature is read by multiple people who contribute to various sectors of society, such as medical professionals, legal experts, political leaders, and so on. When a person reads a story, they create an opinion based upon the characters and their behaviours in the work. A relatable character who gives a true and real depiction of a certain section of society and vocalises their problems, cultivating sympathy within their readers. For instance, if a person has never met a transgender and has only seen them in movies or books, which could have depicted them in a stereotypical way, they can create some untrue or even dangerous connotations about them. For ages, this has been true for women, people of colour and other marginalised sections of society due to their biased representation in media.

With biases present in publishing industries, the load of creating well-rounded female characters fall on the shoulder of men. A literary work does not have to be written by a feminist or has to be a feminist work to give an accurate and proper description of women. Basic details

like physical appearance, dialogues or conversations with other characters, etc., should not vary due to gender. Relatable characters in a story only help in creating a well-knit plot where readers can descend into the world imagined by the author when they write the text. A lack of good characters can bore a reader or make them disinterested in the story. With roughly half of the population being women and many of those being avid readers, it is important for authors to introduce relatable female characters in their works. As the literary world moves forward by incorporating new concepts in literature, it is high time that authors like Haruki Murakami introduce their readers to fresh, real and relatable female characters.

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