

**WOMEN'S POSITION IN *MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA*
WRITTEN BY ARTHUR GOLDEN (1997):
A FEMINIST APPROACH**



RESEARCH PAPER

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

The novel, "*Memoirs of a Geisha*", was written by Arthur Golden. Published in 1997 in the United States, it was a bestseller of the year. For a few years after reading it, Steven Spielberg worked on a film adaptation version of the book and was attached as the director. Being busy with other projects, Spielberg decided to drop the director title in early 2002. The project had a few other director candidates during 2002 and 2003 including Spike Jonze and Kimberley Peirce, and eventually settled with Rob Marshall (*Chicago*). Spielberg is now one of the producers of the film.

Memoirs of a Geisha, published in 1997, is Arthur Golden's debut novel. The bestselling novel was a long time in the making, Golden spent more than ten years on the novel, throwing out the first two drafts before finding his "voice" in the first person account that was a publishing success. Golden was born in 1957 in Chattanooga, Tennessee, to a family of journalists. His parents, Ben and Ruth, published the *Chattanooga Times*, and in the early 2000 his cousin, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, published the *New York Times*. Golden's parents divorced when he was eight, and his father died five years later. Golden relates this to his challenges with the Chairman's character as Sayuri's love interest. Because his father was absent for much of his childhood, Golden struggled to make the character and the relationship

believable. Golden attended Harvard College (the school of fine arts at Harvard University), where he earned a degree in art history with a specialty in Japanese art. He then completed a master's degree in Japanese history (he also learned Mandarin Chinese) in 1980 from Columbia University. After a summer at Beijing University and a work stint for an English language magazine in Tokyo from 1980 to 1982, Golden returned to the United States. He entered Boston University, where he completed a master's degree in English in 1988. After his graduation, he worked as a writer and instructor in literature and writing. (McAlpin, 1997).

The unique life of a geisha above has been reflected by Arthur Golden more specifically in his novel entitled *Memoirs of a Geisha*. He wrote the memoirs of his friends who once ever served herself as a geisha. Arthur Golden was one of the greatest American novelist who has written many literary work such as *as Geisha* (1999), *Die Geisha* (2000), and *Memoirs of a geisha* that has been translated into 21 languages.

Memoirs of a Geisha tells the story of a young girl, Chiyo, who is sold into the life of a geisha and her struggle as a geisha to find love. Tells the story of Chiyo Sakamoto, who is sold into a life of servitude by her parents when she is nine years old. Chiyo is taken in by the proprietress of a geisha house, Mother (Kaori Momoi), where she works to pay off the debt of her purchase and the soiling of a silk kimono owned by a well known geisha, Mameha (Michelle Yeoh), which Chiyo was blackmailed into defacing by another geisha, Hatsumomo (Gong Li). One day while crying in the street, the

young Chiyo is noticed by the Chairman (Ken Watanabe), who buys her an iced sorbet and gives her his handkerchief. Inspired by his act of kindness, Chiyo resolves to become a geisha so that she may one day become a part of the Chairman's life. Chiyo, now a young woman, is taken under the wing of Mameha, head of a rival geisha house. Under Mameha's tutelage, the girl Chiyo becomes Sayuri, the most famous geisha in all Gion, Kyoto. Hatsumomo becomes Sayuri's rival and seeks to destroy her, however Hatsumomo ends up destroying herself instead after setting fire to the okiya. (Dalby, 1983).

Sayuri, through her work as a geisha, is reunited with the Chairman, whom she has secretly loved since she was a girl, although she is led to believe he has no memory of who she was before she became a geisha. Her prosperous life is cut short by the outbreak of World War II and while the safety of Sayuri and Mameha is ensured by the Chairman, they must endure a life of hard labour. After the war, Sayuri is reunited with Mameha, and they become geisha once more.

The Chairman arranges to meet Sayuri, where he finally reveals to her that he knows she is Chiyo. He tells her that he was responsible for sending Mameha to her so that she may fulfill her dreams of becoming a geisha. Sayuri finally reveals her love to the Chairman, which she has been harboring for over fifteen years. The novel ends with their loving embrace and a stroll through a beautiful Japanese garden with waterfalls and rocks.

In 1982, Golden married Trudy Legee, whom he met on a flight to Beijing. The couple has two children, a son named Hays and a daughter named Tess, and lives in Brookline, Massachusetts. *Memoirs of a Geisha* are full of surprises, especially to Western readers unfamiliar with the mysterious Japanese geisha. Perhaps the biggest surprise, however, is the novel's author, an American man from Tennessee. Arthur Golden's fascination with Asian culture was sparked years before he began writing *Memoirs of a Geisha*, as he holds degrees in Japanese history and art history with a specialization in Japanese art. It was while learning and working abroad that he met Mineko Iwasaki, a retired geisha who agreed to numerous interviews with Golden in preparation for his novel. Iwasaki provided critical "inside" information that gives the novel both integrity and intrigue.

The rags riches story of Sayuri, the novel's heroine, is a first person account, as if she is relating her life story to an American professor. The novel addresses themes such as freedom, beauty, metamorphosis, and gender relationships. Upon publication in 1997, *Memoirs of a Geisha* quickly became a bestseller, an impressive showing for a first time author. *Memoirs of a Geisha* have been translated into more than twenty languages and have sold more than four million copies in English. Critics and readers alike have embraced the novel, and in the first few years after publication, it was a popular book club selection.

In patriarchy, a social system positioning a man as a superior and a woman as inferior creates the pattern of sex role behavior which embedded

deeply in the mind of both man and woman (Anderson, 1983:13). It means that the system of the culture and their dependent to men, positioning woman easily to be exploited.

Mary Wollstonecraft, one of feminist, authored “*A Vindication of Their Right of Women (1792)*”. She maintained that women should stand up for their righter and not allow their male dominated society to define what it means to be woman (Bessler, 1999: 181). Woman themselves should get similar chance like man. Most importantly, they should change the patriarchal assumption that women are inferior to men.

In Japanese society some of Japanese women enter a unique profession named “*geisha*”, a profession which makes their position quite different from woman in common. Geisha is a professional hostess who entertains guest through various performing art such as dancing traditional dance, singing and playing shamisen in teahouses called an Ochaya, their primary job is to make man feel warm, witty, and virile.

Feminism & Women's Position in Society
Feminism is the ideological movement that supports women's rights, interests and equality with men in political, economic and social fields. As a doctrine it started during the French revolution, when the problem of a real feminine emancipation grew up in women's mind. In the past centuries women have always been in a lower position in front of their husbands. If they belonged to rich or well off families they had to stay at home and worry about its maintaining, the direction of domestic life and the growth

of their children, while if they were poor they worked as much as men and at the same time had to look after all the domestic work. Men controlled women's life at home and in the social context, so they could never say to be free. Women, moreover, had not the right to vote, to participate to social life, and to express their opinion, for example, through the press, like men could do. The First World War was a turning point for women's situation; in fact it gradually changed, with the birth, for example, of women's colleges in British universities. In England women obtained the suffrage in 1918 and its extension to all women on the same basis as men came in 1928. In the same time employment opportunities grew up very quickly and women were offered works in factories such as men, and this fact meant, for a lot of women, an important source of independence.

Memoirs of a Geisha is an interesting novel; there are four aspects that make this novel really interesting. The first is *Memoirs of a Geisha* has very much like Cinderella in Japan. There's the role of the beautiful servant girl, in which Ciyo is absolutely captivating; the gentle prince, a role that Watanabe nearly steals the show once again with; and the evil stepsister.

The second aspect is novel, Arthur Golden wants to illustrate how women are subordinated and exploited in patriarchal society. This novel contains many facts that are revealed by Arthur Golden which reflect woman's position, woman's role, woman's right, and woman's participation in leading her life as a geisha, and there are also many forms of subordination, oppression, exploitation, and violence toward woman.

Third, in this novel, Arthur Golden wants to say that women Right are not given but must be struggled for. *Memoirs of a Geisha* tells the story of a young girl, Chiyo, who is sold into the life of a geisha and her struggle as a geisha to find love.

The last, in this novel Arthur Golden wants to describe that in order to get their rights as human beings women should be smart and talented.

From this point, Sayuri is interesting to be discussed from feminist point of view. She is a woman in the late twentieth century who tries to survive in a very strict society by deciding to be a geisha.

According to those reasons, the researcher would like to explore analyze woman's position in *Memoir's of Geisha* novel based on the Feminist Approach, and the title is **WOMAN'S POSITION IN *MEMOIR'S OF GEISHA* WRITTEN BY ARTHUR GOLDEN (1997): A FEMINIST APPROACH.**

B. Literature Review

There are some researchers who conducted different studies of *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Among the list are Anggarwati (UMS, 2006). Conducted a study entitled Anxiety in Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of Geisha*: Psychoanalytic. In her research paper, she focuses on the anxiety of the major character of the novel. She uses Psychoanalytic Analysis. The researches find out that anxiety raises because of drives from system personality when id want to satisfy soon, superego must consider with moral it will arise conflict in the personality. Then

if the conflict can't be solved, it raises the anxiety and the person will be suffering.

Another research was conducted by Astuti (UMS, 2007), entitled A comparison between Novel and Movie Version of Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of Geisha*: A Structural Analysis. In her research paper, she finds out the similarities and differences between them. She uses structural analysis. The differences lie on limitation characters and characterization, setting of place, plot and point of view, the similarities lie on the character and characterization, setting, plot and theme.

In the novel version there is only one major character (Sayuri), but there are two characters (Sayuri and Hatsumomo) in movie version. The setting of the novel version is takes place in Japan and United States of America, while in the movie version, the story happen in Kyoto, Japan.

From the literature review above, the writer assumes that there is no other researcher who analyzes Woman's position in Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*: A Feminist approach.

C. Problem Statement

The main problem of the study is "How woman's position is being reflected in Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*?".

D. Limitation of Study

The limitation of the study is on the analysis of woman's position in Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* based on feminist approach.

E. Objectives of Study

The objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To analyze the novel in terms of structural elements.
2. To analyze the novel based on feminist perspective.

F. Benefits of Study

The benefits expected from the study are as follows:

1. Theoretical Benefit

This study expected to give contribution to the larger body of knowledge especially on understanding literary studies on Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* by using feminist approach.

2. Practical Benefit

This study is expected to enrich the researcher's own understanding about the novel and the application of the theory in the analysis.

G. Research Method

The writer analyzes Woman's position in Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a geisha*. The study of Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a geisha* in this research paper will cover:

1. Type of the Study.

In analyzing Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a geisha*, the researcher uses qualitative research. Qualitative research involves the studied use a collection of a variety of empirical materials case study; personal experience: introspection; life story: interview, artifact: cultural texts and production; observational, historical, interrelation, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moment and meanings in individuals live.

2. Type of Data and Data Sources.

The type of data in this research is text and the writer obtains the data from some books that have relation to the study, those are:

a. Primary Data.

The primary data is taken from the novel *Memoirs of a geisha* that is written by Arthur Golden and published by Division of Random House, Inc. New York. 1997. It includes ideas, attitude, the ways of thinking, and dialogues among the characters in the novel *Memoirs of a geisha* relating to their role.

b. Secondary Data.

Secondary data is data that support the primary data including information, which deals with text and with problem of this research.

These data cover author's biography, many ideas from the theory of feminism that will be used in analyzing the novel and among other pieces of relevant information to analysis of this research.

3. Technique of the Data Collecting

The data collecting method and technique in this study is library research, the steps are as follows:

- a. Reading the novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* many times.
- b. Identifying the problem and to find the data. Therefore, research problem and objective of the study can be drawn.
- c. Collecting some supporting data from other references related to the topic. Therefore, the problems appearing will be able to be answered completely.
- d. Drawing the conclusion of the analysis that has already done in the former chapter.

4. Technique of the Data Analyzis

The technique of data analysis in this research paper is descriptive analysis. The analysis uses word, sentences or picture as the data research, and the data reports will contain quotation or documentation.

H. Research Organization

To give clear understanding of the contents of this study, the writer has appointed the presentation of the study. The presentation of this study consists of six chapters. Chapter I deal with introduction covering the background of the study, literature review, problem statement, research limitation, research objective, research benefit, research method, and research organization. Chapter II deals with underlying theory containing the description of the theory of feminism. Chapter III deals with social background of American society in the late of twentieth century. Chapter IV deals with structural analysis containing the structural elements of the novel and discussion. Chapter V presents feminist analysis. Chapter VI is conclusion and suggestion.