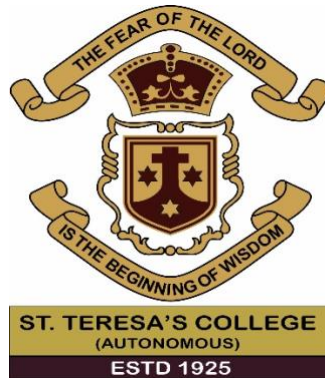


**MEMORY, CULTURE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A STUDY OF
RUTH OZEKI'S *A TALE FOR THE TIME BEING***



*Project submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University in partial fulfilment of
the requirement for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in
English Language and Literature*

By

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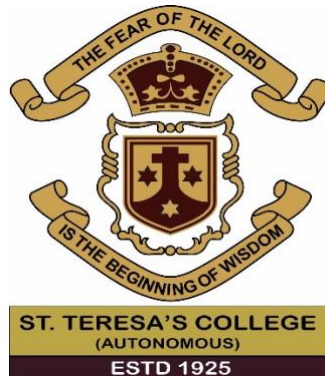
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I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “Memory, Culture and Autobiography: A Study of Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Maria Theresa Chakkunny, Assistant Professor, Department of English and Centre for Research, and that no part of the dissertation has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, diploma or any other similar title of recognition.

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March, 2023

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Memory, Culture and Autobiography: A Study of Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being*” is a record of bona fide work carried out by Amala Anna Thomas under my supervision and guidance.

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March 2023

An Abstract of the Project Entitled:

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Literature is a living embodiment of memory. Creation of a literary piece of work is an evocative act by the very fact that it involves instantaneous and ancestral memories, both inherent and acquired. Literature acts as an instrument of cultural recall. Works of literature help elicit collective memories by reminiscing about the past and crystallizing the collective experiences of the past in the form of narratives that can last for ages. Memory about self can also be mediated through literature. Memory contributes to our sense of self and plays an integral role in our narrative selfhood. Autobiographical memory promotes a social relationship by retrieving and sharing personal experiences that help to establish, thrive, nurture, and sustain social associations and relationships. This aspect of cultural and autobiographical memory can be witnessed in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*. It is an intriguing tale about connections across time, space and cultures. The book successfully conjures up two distinct cultures of Nao, a sixteen year old Japanese girl and Ruth, an American novelist. The novel explores the way in which Nao and Ruth exist in different moments in time but come together through Nao's diary.

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Amala Anna Thomas

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Introduction

"I have a pretty good memory, but memories are time beings, too, like cherry blossoms or ginkgo leaves; for a while they are beautiful, and then they fade and die" (Ozeki 390)

Our life narrative is spun from different strands of memories, much like a piece of fabric. Each recollection enriches the fabric with a distinctive colour and texture, painting a rich and intricate portrait of who we are. Our memories are more than just recollections of the past; they play a crucial role in shaping who we are as individuals and how we view the world. They improve interpersonal interactions and imaginative thinking while providing us with a feeling of individuality and emotional stability. Our encounters, occurrences, and moments are preserved in our brain as memories. They can be joyful, sorrowful, fascinating, or ordinary, but they all weave together to form the fabric of our existence. There are moments when certain sights, sounds, or smells bring back memories of a specific period. On other occasions, we may consciously go back to a recollection and relive it. Some recollections disintegrate over time, but others last for a lifetime or even longer. Without our recollections, we would be not be able to recount the events of our lives, which would weaken our sense of individuality. We can reminisce on the past, make meaning of the present, and make plans for the future because of our memories. They help us feel like ourselves and allow us to interact with others by exchanging memories. Employing our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, we can recall memories. Our understanding of the present-day circumstances and upcoming happenings is constantly impacted by our never-ending stream of recollections. In a nutshell, our memories mirror our experiences and help form our life narratives, morals, and

personality traits. The significance of the impact of memories on individuals can be traced in the metafictional work *A Tale for the Time Being*, penned by Ruth Ozeki.

Ruth Ozeki is a novelist, filmmaker, and Zen Buddhist priest whose works have won praise worldwide for their ability to amalgamate various topics on the themes of science, technology, religion, politics of the environment, and global popular culture. She resides in New York and British Columbia. Three of her novels—*My Year of Meats* (1998), *All Over Creation* (2002), and *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) have won awards. *My Year of Meats*, Ozeki's debut book, was released in 1998 and won the Kiriya Prize and the Imus American Book Award. Her widely praised independent films have been broadcast on PBS and Sundance, including *Halving the Bones* (1996). In 2015, Ozeki became The Leo Tolstoy Museum and Estate's first foreign recipient of the Yasnaya Polyana Literary Award for Foreign Literature for her book *A Tale for the Time Being*. The Man Booker Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award had this novel on their shortlists. The readers well received the book. Ruth has been a Buddhist practitioner for many years. Ruth received her ordination in 2010 and is connected to both the Brooklyn Zen Centre and the Everyday Zen Foundation.

The novel illustrates the numerous ways in which memories can affect an individual's existence. Ruth, a novelist who resides on Vancouver Island, discovers a Hello Kitty box consisting of a red book with a French title, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, a novel by Marcel Proust, a stack of letters, and a French diary washed up on the seashore. The package belonged to a sixteen-year-old Japanese American girl named Naoko Yasutani from Tokyo. Nao, a girl with a dual identity as a Japanese and an American, is bullied by her classmates at school. To escape these traumatic experiences, Nao decides to end her life. Before ending her life, Nao plans to

document the life of her hundred-and-four-year-old great-grandmother, Jiko, a Buddhist nun. However, she ends up recording her life events in the diary. The contents of Nao's journal are more of a protracted suicide note. Ruth, who receives the diary from the beach side, begins to read the diary. Soon she gets entangled with the exciting narrative of Nao. She sets on the mission to find the girl and save her from attempting suicide. Ruth's involvement with the diary begins to influence her and significantly impacts her personal life. Both Ruth and Nao are shown facing problems in their life. While Ruth has been worried about the unfinished memoir about her late mother's progression through Alzheimer's disease for the past ten years and her alienated life on the island, Nao is struggling with the mystery of her own life. The impact of their distinctive pasts has enslaved both. Through the medium of her diary, Nao could develop a close relationship with Ruth, who resides on a completely different side of the planet. Nao's memory triggers Ruth's recollections as well. This forms the framework of the novel.

The book can be analysed from the perspective of memory studies. The interdisciplinary field of memory studies emerged with an emphasis on personal memory before expanding to include social memory in general and the political aspects of collective memory, particularly those that are mediated by the media. The book offers an opportunity to examine two significant facets of memory studies. They are cultural memory and autobiographical memory. Given that culture reflects a community or a country, it is considered extremely essential. This implies that the culture of a community greatly influences how it responds, reacts, and develops both separately and collectively. Memories are shaped by culture. Cultural memory is the institutionalised and objectified recollections that can be preserved, passed down, and reused over several generations. It can be created by symbolic heritage, which is

present in texts, rituals, monuments, festivals, items, sacred texts, and other media sources that act as cognitive signals to set in motion the meanings related to what has occurred. The subtle cultural nuances of Japanese society are projected in *A Tale for the Time Being*. The readers are introduced to the depth of Japanese culture by examining different Japanese cultural practices.

Autobiographical memory is an elaborate combination of memories of repeated, and lengthy events organised together into an engaging narrative that has been self-constructed and evaluated through sociocultural practices. For the advancement of autobiographical memory, language and narrative are essential. This aspect of autobiographical memory can be traced by examining the character dyads of Ruth and Nao and Haruki #1 and Haruki #2. Ruth Ozeki, the author, also sets the characters against the background of two significant historical occasions. The World War II, 9/11 incident and an earthquake and a consequent tsunami that hit Japan in 2011. Thousands of individuals lost their lives because of the calamities that devastated whole coastal regions. That was the largest earthquake Japan had ever seen. The novel also highlights Japan's participation in World War II. During the World War II, after ratifying the Tripartite Pact in 1940, Japan allied with Germany and Italy to form the Axis. Following an organised Japanese attack on American forces at Pearl Harbor in 1941, the United States officially allied with the Allies. As an outcome of the American attacks, Japan was impacted. In a last-ditch effort to compensate for their damages, the Japanese government ordered all students of nineteen and older to drop out of university and sign up for military duty in 1943. One of these students was Haruki #1, Nao's great-uncle who is presented as a kamikaze pilot in the book, a pilot who flies a suicide mission and crashes his aircraft into an American warship.

The terrorists who attacked the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, are compared to the kamikaze pilots in the novel. As Nao, Ruth, and the other characters watch the heart-breaking and despairing images of New Yorkers frequently failing to flee death, they are horrified by the attacks of the terrorists and are extremely disturbed. The book also depicts the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as tragic fallout from 9/11, as well as the violence that followed against people of colour in America. Thus, the traumatic incidents of these historical events contribute towards their autobiographical memory. In addition to these, Ruth, one of the book's main protagonists, is based on the author Ruth Ozeki. The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter introduces the theory of memory studies, exploring two significant forms of memory: cultural and autobiographical. The second chapter analyses the novel based on cultural memory, explaining how the novel portrays the cultural nuances of Japanese culture through the novel. The third chapter analyses the novel based on autobiographical memory by exploring the lives of the notable characters of the novel.

Chapter 1

Exploring the theory of Memory Studies

Memory has emerged over the past two decades as an interdisciplinary phenomenon that is central to the academic discourse in a variety of well-established fields. However, no single discipline has exclusive ownership of "memory." Instead, the study of the relationship between culture and memory involves sociology, philosophy, history, archaeology, religious studies, literary and art history, media studies, psychology, and the neurosciences. An increase in the interest in cultural memory coincided with changes in Western temporality's structure as well as political and cultural sensibilities. Until the 1980s, the past had been mostly the domain of historians' research and had received little attention from the general population. Memory and the past were suddenly all over the place since 2000. These subjects entered the public sphere and became everyone's concern. A system of values, objects, institutions, and practices that preserve the past for the present and future is known as cultural memory. As people define themselves and are defined by their affiliation to one or more cultural groups and traditions, it transfers knowledge and encourages the formation of distinct identities. The current study of cultural memory is based on two traditions, both of which date back to the 1920s. They are Aby Warburg's art-historical interest in a European memory of images (*Bildgedächtnis*) and Maurice Halbwachs' sociological research on *mémoire collective*. Halbwachs and Warburg were the first to give the phenomenon of cultural memory a name (respectively "collective" and "social" memory) and to study it in detail within the context of a contemporary theory of culture. Maurice Halbwachs, a student of Henri Bergson and Emile Durkheim, was a French sociologist who lived from 1877 to 1945.

He wrote three texts in which he developed his idea of *collective mémoire*. These texts are still important to the study of cultural memory today.

By defining memory as a social and cultural process rather than a biological condition, Halbwachs added a new perspective to the issue. He considered collective memory in his 1941 work *Topographie Laire*, expanding his memory definition to include monuments and symbols of all kinds. Later he broadened the field by proposing a model of collective memory that dates back several thousand years and relies on media and objects of remembrance rather than social communication alone. This contrasts with generational memory, which is typically restricted to an individual's autobiographical memory exchange. Halbwachs focuses on collectively constructed knowledge and its transmission through social practices and traditions, proposing monuments and archaeological sites as examples of this type of object. In Halbwachs's studies of collective memory, there are three main areas of analysis that point to three major areas of research on cultural memory:

First, the theory of Halbwachs that individual memory is reliant on social frameworks and structures. His idea of *cadres sociaux* is the basis of Halbwachs' theory of collective memory. In the first section of *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Halbwachs provides a thorough explanation of the collective components of individual memory utilising his views on dreams and language. He arrives to the conclusion that every act of remembering must begin with the use of *cadres sociaux*, or social frameworks. According to Halbwachs, social frameworks begin with the people in our immediate surroundings. People are social animals. According to Halbwachs, a person cannot access their own memory and the obvious collective phenomena like language and customs, when they are alone. This is because we typically share experiences with others, who can also assist us in recalling them later.

Secondly, his research into different types of memory that span generations known as the intergenerational memory. Thirdly, his inclusion of cultural transmission and the formation of tradition is found in the definition of *mémoire collective*.

As a result, Halbwachs unites, albeit implicitly, two fundamental concepts of collective memory that are fundamentally distinct from one another. Firstly, collective memory as the natural memory of a person that operates in a sociocultural environment. Secondly, collective memory as the construction of shared versions of the past through relationships, interaction, media, and organisations within both smaller social networks and significant cultural groups.

The second fundamental concept of cultural memory is also the work of a 1920s scholar. Today, the art and cultural historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929) is regarded as a significant pioneer of the contemporary interdisciplinary study of culture and the Warburg Library (*Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg*), which served as its icon when it was in Hamburg. Warburg's opposition to the "policing of disciplinary boundaries" characterised its initial arrangement. His extensive collection was arranged in accordance with cultural-historical themes, encouraging an approach that transcends genres, media, and epochs. Warburg claims that symbol serves as cultural "energy store." The recall of symbols is the foundation of culture. Warburg developed the idea of a cultural image memory, which he referred to as "social memory" among other terms. Halbwach's work provided access points for later scholars to continue in his line of thought. The prominent scholars who followed Halbwach are Pierre Nora, Aleida and Jan Assmann (Erl 12).

At the end of the 1980s, Aleida and Jan Assmann introduced the theory of "Cultural Memory" (*das kulturelle Gedächtnis*), which has proven to be the most influential approach to memory studies in the German-speaking world. The

systematic, nuanced, and theoretically sound description of the connection between culture and memory is one of its main accomplishments. Since the 1980s, the social and humanities disciplines have become increasingly interested in a variety of phenomena. The Assmanns' theory allows for the treatment of these phenomena, especially by emphasising the interdependencies between cultural memory, collective identity, and political legitimacy.

Jan Assmann coined the term "Cultural Memory" and provided the following definition in an essay titled "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," published in German in 1988 and English in 1995:

The idea of cultural memory consists of a repository of reusable documents, images, and traditions that are unique to each community and each era and are "cultivated" in order to preserve and transmit that community's sense of self. Each group establishes its understanding of uniformity and specificity on such collective insight, which is primarily (but not solely) of past experiences. (132).

According to Assmann, the meaning of the term "Cultural Memory" is established by a group of central characteristics. First, the formation of a cultural memory from which social groups derive their collective identity is known as "creation of identity." Second, the insight that every memory is connected to the current situation is considered in the capacity of Cultural Memory to reconstruct. Cultural Memory is a product of the past. The first distinguishing characteristic between the communicative and cultural memory frameworks is formation (130-132).

The meaning of Cultural Memory must be maintained through established, stable forms of expression whereas communicative memory is more amenable. The creation of "memory figures" (*Erinnerungsfiguren*), the amalgamation of an image

and a term or narrative (as in the memory figure of "Exodus"), is one of Cultural Memory's stabilisation strategies. The institutionalisation of Cultural Memory and the specialisation of its carriers are referred to as organisation. Most of the time, elites like shamans, priests, or historians serve as the memory guardians. The duty to preserve cultural memory "creates a distinct system of norms and important distinctions"(Assmann 131) for the group. Finally, the trait of reflexivity indicates that Cultural Memory is self-reflective and reflects the group's lifeworld and self-image.

Pierre Nora came up with the term "place of memory" in 1984 and used it to describe the artifacts where collective memory crystallises itself. In the preface to his English translation, P. Nora gives the following interpretation of the concept of "places of memory" (*lieu de memoire*). According to Nora, it is any significant phenomenon, materialised or intangible in nature, which by human will or under the influence of time has acquired the meaning of a symbol in the memorial heritage of a community (12). Places of memory makes collective memory possible. The latter take physical, symbolic, and functional forms. Monuments, memorials, and monuments to the dead are examples of material forms. Functional forms include images on banknotes and awarding streets, businesses, and other establishments with the names of notable people or events. Broken memory necessitates external support, which can be found in memory locations. As a result, the significance of the nation's most iconic symbols, like the Bastille in France, was enshrined in symbolic forms (Nora 12). The power of memory can be seen in its tangible remnants, which create the space in which memory and history accumulate. The idea, which was developed to investigate French memory, quickly sparked debate regarding its applicability to other nations.

However, according to Halbwachs' definition, sites of memory cannot constitute collective memory. Contrary to what Halbwach stated, Nora claims that

there are actually "*eux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory." (Nora 7). During the Third Republic of the nineteenth century, the French sites of memory were established. At that time, the national memory helped people form an identity as a group, but over the course of the twentieth century, this function slowly diminished. Nora asserts that the today's society is going through a transitional phase, during which the connection to a lived, group and nation-specific, identity-forming past is breaking down. As a result, sites of memory serve as a fake placeholder for the natural collective memory that has vanished. Nora states that memory sites can be divided into three dimensions; material, symbolic, and functional (19).

In material dimension, the cultural objectifications are sites of memory. They include not only things that can be "grasped," like books or paintings; According to Nora, "past events, as well as commemorative minutes of silence, exhibit a material dimension because they literally (break) a temporal continuity" (19). In functional dimension, these objectifications must serve a social purpose. Famous books, like Ernest Lavis's *Histoire de France* (Nora 151-186), are first turned into memory sites for a specific purpose. The *Histoire de France* was a textbook that governed school history instruction. The silence serves the purpose of periodically bringing back memories. Lastly, in symbolic dimension the objectification must have a symbolic meaning in addition to its function. This is the situation, for instance, when actions transform into rituals or when places acquire a "symbolic aura" (19). A cultural object first becomes a site of memory due to this intentional symbolic signification, which can be attributed to the objectification at the time of its creation or later.

Personally experienced incidents comprises of various individual memories that not only make up our daily life but are preserved in autobiographical memory.

Memories of directly encountered events that go beyond the scope of a purely factual account of the event which incorporates individual beliefs, ideas, and feelings are referred to as autobiographical memories. (Bruner 99). Autobiographical memories play psychosocial roles in daily living, and the usage of memories is associated with how strong they are. Together, they create what is known as an "autobiographical memory network," a collection of memories that houses the specific details that make up each person's particular life narrative. (Fivush et al. 323).

The strategy prior to that was entirely clinical or psychoanalytic in orientation, with a diagnostic or therapeutic goal. Researchers have embraced a cognitive methodology over the past thirty five years and are attempting to interpret autobiographical memory within the theoretical framework of conventional memory research. As there is so much data and variety, this project has been really challenging. It is a strenuous effort to identify the fundamental rules that control the encoding, storing, and retrieval of personal experiences gathered over lifetimes by many people with various personal histories. Nevertheless, at least some progress has been made in identifying the most important topics and investigating data collection strategies. The autobiographical knowledge base provides information about the self that is utilised to describe who the self is, who the self has been, and whom the self might become. Three broad categories, lifetime periods, general events, and knowledge related to individual events, are used to group this information.

Lifetime periods are made up of general information regarding a distinct and focused period in a person's life, for instance, the time spent in school (school theme) or beginning a career (work theme). Although there is a clear beginning and conclusion to each lifetime span, they frequently overlap and are hazy in nature. Lifetime periods comprise temporal knowledge about the period's length and thematic

knowledge about its characteristics, such as the events, people, and places involved. These times can be categorised under more general themes using thematic information, which can reflect individual attitudes or objectives. As an illustration, a time period in one's life with the topic of "when I lost my job" can fit into the more general category of "when everything went wrong for me" or "small setbacks in my life."

General events include single representations of recurrent events or a series of connected events and are more specific than lifetime periods. General events tend to cluster together based on recurring themes, and if one memory of a general event is remembered, it prompts the recall of additional related experiences. These memory clumps frequently revolve around the idea of accomplishing or falling short of individual goals. Groups of common occurrences that can be categorised as "first-time" accomplishments or situations, such as the first time attending a baseball game seem to have a particular vividness. These memories of achieving goals convey significant self-knowledge, such as the ease with which a skill can be learned or a person's success and failure rates for particular tasks.

Event-specific knowledge (ESK) is vividly specific knowledge about experiences, frequently in the form of sensory-perceptual qualities and visual imagery. Though specific memories for certain events have a tendency to last longer, the high levels of detail in ESK fade away fairly soon. Event-specific memories that will resist memory decay include initiating events (events that signal the start of a path toward long-term goals), turning points (events that re-direct plans from original goals), anchoring situations (events that confirm a person's convictions and objectives) that will resist memory decay. Within the autobiographical knowledge base, these three categories are arranged in a hierarchy and make up a person's life

story together. The knowledge maintained over lifetimes contains hints for general events, while knowledge at the level of general events refers to knowledge specific to a particular event. Autobiographical memory is created when a cue equally activates the autobiographical knowledge base hierarchy, making all levels of knowledge accessible.

The four primary forms of autobiographical memories include Personal or Biographical which consists of those autobiographical memories that frequently includes biographical details, such as one's birthplace or parents' names. The second primary form is Reconstructions versus Copies. Contrasted with reconstructions, copies are intense, sensory-perceptual, autobiographical memories of an event that are rich in visual and other sensory-perceptual knowledge. These autobiographical memories vary in their degree of veracity. Autobiographical memories that have been rebuilt to include new information or interpretations made with the benefit of hindsight are called reconstructions. The third primary form is Generic vs Specific. Generic autobiographical memories are hazy and include little detail other than the event that occurred; specific autobiographical memories contain a precise remembrance of a specific occurrence (event-specific knowledge). Generic memories are another subcategory of episodic autobiographical memories when a single memory of an event serves as a standard for a group of related occurrences. Finally, in the Observer vs Field form, there are various ways to experience autobiographical memories. Field memories are recollections that are remembered from the first-person perspective and in the original context. Memories recalled from a position outside of us, a third-person point of view, are called observer memories. The viewpoint which is used to remember former memories is usually that of an observer. Observer memories are more often reconstructions, although field memories are more realistic,

like copies. Remember vs Know categories can be used to separate autobiographical recollections. A recalled memory's source is typically a personal event. An external source, not one's memory, is cited as the origin of a known memory. This frequently results in a source-monitoring error, in which a person may think that a memory is their own when in fact the information came from somewhere else.

The three primary theoretical viewpoints that have emerged from the theoretical examination of the functions of autobiographical memory are that it has directive, social, and self-functions. The three primary roles of autobiographical memory are said to be directive, personal, and social. Williams, Conway, and Cohen proposed the fourth function, adaptive (43). The directive function of autobiographical memory entails using memories of the past to direct and influence present and future behaviour, as well as a tool for problem-solving and behaviour prediction. More specifically, when memories are applied to address present or upcoming issues or obstacles, they perform a directive role.

Autobiographical memory is distinguished by its relationship to the self. The database from which the self is constructed is made up of events that have meaning for the individual. Happy and negative memories may both be used to build a feeling of self-continuity across time. However, recollecting positive events to uphold a positive self-view may generally be more adaptive. The memory from one's own life has an adaptive purpose. Recalling happy memories from the past might help a person keep a positive attitude or change a negative one. By using autobiographical memory recall to control one's mood internally, one can develop emotional resilience and learn to deal with challenging circumstances. With Baddeley's "But what the hell is it for?" article, the functional approach to memory was formally launched, inspiring academics to look at memory events in realistic settings.

Autobiographical memory aids in the creation of models of seen events and individuals that facilitate a deeper comprehension of other people's psyches.

Complementing these presumptions, Cohen argues that autobiographical memory can also result in the formation of individual beliefs and attitudes (108). According to the scholars, such as Ulric Neisse, the main purpose of Autobiographical memory is to facilitate social connection by recovering and sharing personal experiences (15).

Autobiographical memories are seen as vignettes that serve to establish, grow, nurture, and uphold social ties and relationships. Most frequently, personal memories are used to share experiences and promote comprehension and empathy in relationships with others. Due to self-disclosure processes, people tend to feel closer to the listener after sharing an autobiographical memory, which may encourage closeness function with reference to the listener.

The social function of autobiographical memory has a wide range of functions. The most useful way to think of it is as an overarching dimension that is divided into specialised but complementary sub-functions. Empirical investigations provide evidence for such a viewpoint. For instance, it has been proposed that one of the social functions of autobiographical memory is to be used to impart important life lessons, or the so-called Teach/Inform function (Webster 260). Although scholars have suggested that these two functions are a reflection of distinct phases of the connections throughout generations, Bluck et al. initially divided social function into two aspects, addressing the nurturing of existing relationships and the development of new ones (94).

For autobiographical memory to develop, language and narrative are essential. Language is one of the most fundamental instruments that cultures offer for structuring experience from a social-cultural standpoint (Vygotsky ch. 8). Although it

is evident that language does not determine thought, it favours some types of thought over others. Language offers narrative structuring, especially for autobiographical memory. The standard linguistic form of a narrative describes a series of events and the relationships among them. Coherent narratives go beyond a straightforward chronology to offer a justification for why and how things happened the way they did. The framework incorporates goals, motivations, ideas, and feelings to give events a human touch and context. A coherent narrative, as opposed to a chronology, explains why a sequence of events played out the way that it did and why it is vital for understanding oneself and others in the context of a social and cultural world. This is not meant as a defense of the notion that autobiographical recollection is language based. Autobiographical memory, like all memory, is made up of several sensory components that are stored and retrieved across various brain locations. These fragments are retrieved and rebuilt while recalling an autobiographical memory using canonical story forms as an organisational framework. The claim is that culturally determined narratives, language forms that offer frameworks and principles for comprehending how human events occur, influence how people learn to recall their pasts.

Language also offers these formats, enabling people to communicate about their past with others and develop both collective and individual understandings of it. More specifically, language allows us to communicate our feelings and thoughts about events to others and for them to do the same. This is how narratives transition from the "landscape of actions" to the "landscape of consciousness", according to Bruner (14). People can share another's perspective on a prior event through narratives. We gain a more complex understanding of these events and ourselves through discussing the events of our lives with others. We gain a sense of subjective

perspective on the past by comprehending how others perceive it and how it differs from and is similar to our ideas and feelings. So, we develop a sense of ourselves through sharing stories about the past with others and reflecting together.

Chapter 2

Cultural Memory in *A Tale for the Time Being*

Ruth Ozeki's novel *A Tale for the Time Being* gives us a glimpse into two different worlds: that of Naoko Yasutani, a 16-year-old living in Tokyo, and the peaceful, cramped existence of Japanese American novelist Ruth, who, like the author, resides in British Columbia with her artist-naturalist husband, Oliver. Nao is related to Ruth as both are of Japanese American descent. Although she was raised in Silicon Valley and was born to Japanese parents, she feels at ease speaking English rather than Japanese. She is in an unfortunate situation in Japan and is thinking about completely "falling out of time." The story provides a thorough depiction of Japanese culture through the character Nao. The narrative of Nao spans several generations and includes tales of her father, who attempted suicide, her great-grandmother Jiko, a Buddhist nun, and her late grand-uncle Haruki #1, a kamikaze pilot.

The symbolic legacy found in texts, rituals, monuments, celebrations, objects, sacred texts, and other media serves as a mnemonic trigger to initiate meanings related to what has happened. This is how cultural memory is formed. Additionally, it revives the period of the mythical beginnings, crystallises societal experiences from the past, and endures for millennia.

Culture is divided into two categories by Aleida Assmann in her 1991 article "*Kultur als Lebenswelt und Monument*." According to the author, one aspect of culture deals with modern-day experiences, or more specifically, with the "life-world" of people residing in a particular period of time and place. According to Assmann, this aspect of culture unites people of the same generation; it lacks objectivity and is founded on social actions, interactions, and communication within this social group.

Assmann refers to this aspect of society as *Lebenswelt* (English: life-world) (Assmann 11). However, the opposing culture's core has a distinct agenda. Assmann refers to this second aspect of culture as a Monument, which brings together individuals from various generations rather than just one generation. The foundation of this traditional practice is communication with the ancestors. Its language is remarkably different from the language used in people's daily lives because monuments aim to communicate a particular message to their viewers, whereas the records of people's daily lives can be thought of as quiet traces that do not communicate with the same intentionality and persistence as monuments do (Assmann 11,13).

Since historians are now interested in the customs of previous generations, the idea of cultural memory has grown in importance over the past few decades. Instead of concentrating on the historical messages intentionally left behind by monuments, they are now more interested in reconstructing the life worlds, specific meaning structures, and personal experiences that can be found as traces in historical records and other unintentional media. The lives of previous generations are only sometimes well-documented, unlike monuments. They are also not objective; instead, they can only be seen by carefully piecing together a series of slight hints that together form a picture, a depiction of what earlier generations felt, saw, and experienced. The traces of long-lost lives and worlds can be found in documents, letters, archives, diaries, works of art, and literature, which also act as media of recollection.

A Tale for the Time Being, which explores the significance of the present moment, uses the word "time being," which refers to the present, in the title and throughout the book. Nao, a teenage Japanese girl who keeps a journal of her experiences, explains that because all living things are "time beings," everything and everyone is transient. The journal Ruth discovers in Kitty Lunch Box is a handmade

volume with the cover of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, and is filled with Nao's journal entries. A diary is a tool for preserving cultural recollection. The fundamental goal of Nao's diary was to chronicle Yasutani Jiko, her hundred-and-four-year-old great-grandmother, and her fascinating existence. She was a "New Woman" of the Taisho period, a novelist, and a nun. In this context, *Lost Time* stands for the past, and Japan's slowly vanishing culture, which Nao believes can be saved by documenting the life of Jiko. Jiko, in Nao's opinion, is a collection of Japanese customs and culture. Even though Nao ultimately ends up documenting the events of her eventful life, she also includes stories from her time at the monastery. She also touches on several facets of Jiko's Buddhist lifestyle. Readers can learn about Japanese culture and society properly by using Jiko's fascinating life as a guide. She vowed to save all beings, which essentially means the pledge she has taken not to reach enlightenment until all other beings in this universe have achieved enlightenment. Using the Ginkgo tree in the temple where Jiko resides as an example, Nao discusses the cultural loss in today's youth. Nao believes that Jiko and the tree are "time beings," and that Nao is searching for a lost time among the strewn leaves below. To aid monks in memorising sutras, ginkgo trees were frequently placed on the grounds of Buddhist temples. "I saw an image in my mind of this big old ginkgo tree on the grounds of her temple. The leaves are shaped like little green fans, and in the autumn, they turn bright yellow and fall off and cover the ground, painting everything pure golden" (Ozeki 24). Since ginkgo leaves are believed to strengthen memory, it stands to reason that Nao makes use of Jiko to search for her culture's misplaced recollections.

The concept of "time being" was first introduced in a book called *Shobogenzo* by an ancient Zen master named Dogen Zenji, who was even older than old Jiko or

even Marcel Proust. Dogen Zenji wrote it around eight hundred years ago. Jiko enjoys reading Dōgen Zenji's works. Nao has not honestly read any of Jiko's writings because they are all out of print, but she has told Nao many stories. This caused Nao to consider how words and tales are also time beings, which led Nao to use a significant book to record the life of old Jiko.

Nao was raised in Sunnyvale, California. When Nao was three years old, they relocated to California as her father was a highly paid programmer in Silicon Valley. However, Nao's father's business failed when the dot-com bubble broke. The family was forced to return to Japan after losing their passports. They returned with no savings because Nao's father had taken a large portion of his income in stock options. Nao struggled greatly with the transition because she considered herself to be American and knew very little Japanese. She therefore feels cut off from Japanese society. Nao struggled with the language and needed help figuring out how to act in a Japanese classroom. Nao only knew the fundamentals of speaking Japanese, despite her parents being native speakers. She was older than the other students in her class, and because her parents were poor, she did not receive any allowance. Nao claims that she was bullied mercilessly because of these reasons. She claims that if Jiko had not shown her how to cultivate her "superpower," she would not have withstood the bullying—Nao, fundamentally American, adhered to customs alien to Japanese society. Nao, an American by heart, stopped going to school due to the bullying from her classmates. She failed her high school entrance tests and could only enroll in a low-achieving high school. Given her American educational background, she had no hope of enrolling in a reputable Japanese school. She makes an analogy between her predicament and that of a Ronin, a class of samurai who serve no lord or leader. The samurai gave his daimyo, or master, unwavering devotion to the point of death. When

a samurai loses his master's favour or legal privilege, or when his master dies, the samurai is known as a Ronin. This contrast serves as a reminder of Japanese culture's illustrious past.

Whenever Nao's father accompanied her to school, he used to give her a quick hug and kiss on her forehead. They ensured that no one was watching, as kissing in Japanese culture was considered a sin. In contrast, in American culture, such manifestations of affection were prevalent. Nao is perceived as stuck between the two cultures. In case of parents too, Nao's mother wanted her father to give her his income when he began working again so she could manage it according to Japanese custom. However, her father insisted on depositing it all in a high-yield account in accordance with American custom. It is possible to identify a cultural conflict in the book. Our theory of cultural memory tries to link the three aspects such as memory or synchronous past, culture and the group or society. The relationship to the community or "the concretion of identity" indicates that the knowledge a group uses to understand its uniqueness and unity is preserved in the cultural memory. The definition of the objective expressions of cultural memory involves an identification process that can be positive ("We are this") or negative ("That is our opposite"). As Nietzsche put it, the "constitution of horizons" develops through such a concretisation of identification. Sharp divisions between those who belong and those who do not— between what belongs to oneself and what does not—are characteristics of the knowledge supply in the cultural memory. In the novel, we find Nao being brutally attacked and bullied as she does not qualify for the criteria to be a pure Japanese. She is considered "foreign" by her classmates and is ignored mercilessly. Nao's classmates pretended her to be invisible at school. "Transfer Student Yasutani has not been to school in weeks," her classmates would remark. She was never addressed as Nao or

Naoko. She was referred to as “Transfer Student Yasutani” or “Transfer Student” as if she has no identity. Nao's peers openly questioned whether she was ill in front of her thereby ignoring her presence in the classroom. The other girls held their noses when Nao removed her clothes as they changed out of their uniforms for exercise class because they said it smelled like something had died. According to Nao, this is likely where they got the concept for her funeral. Nao's peers held Nao's funeral in traditional Japanese fashion. At Nao's funeral, her peers placed a framed picture of her at her desk, and they each took a bow as they passed by. The cultural clash had deprived her of her identity.

The essence of cultural memory is reflexive. It is practice-reflexive in the sense that it explains everyday practices and incidents in terms of proverbs, maxims, "ethno-theories," to use Bourdieu's words, rituals (such as sacrifice rituals that explain hunting), and so forth. Access to the past is not always mediated by direct or exclusive knowledge of what has already occurred. Instead, the insertion of past events into the distinct fields of cultural, symbolic, and visual archetypes gives them significance. One example of this aspect is the usage of myths throughout the novel. There are multiple incidents in the novel where Japanese myths and beliefs are incorporated into the novel. The myths are structured to make people believe them to be true. According to Nao, when people awaken in the middle of the night feeling immobile, it is as though a vast, evil entity is crushing them. In Japan, this condition is known as "metal-binding". The Japanese term for dream paralysis is *kanashibari*, which means "bound or fastened in metal." The term "night hag" or "old hag" refers to a mythical being that is frequently connected to the occurrence of sleep paralysis. It is when a person experiences the immobilising sensation of an evil supernatural sitting on their chest or at the foot of their bed. This happened to Nao after her father

attempted suicide. She claims that this ceased after her school "funeral," most likely because she turned into a ghost. Nao fantasised about becoming a ghost and exacting vengeance on her classmates. Nao wished to turn into a real-life apparition.

Ikisudamo, literally "living ghost," is a disembodied soul or ghost that haunts other people or locations, sometimes over very long distances, after leaving the body of a living person in Japanese folklore and popular culture. She had a "crazy cosmic dream" about Reiko, one of her peers, following Nao's funeral. The description of this incident in the diary almost convinces her readers to believe that she possesses some magical powers. Reiko was intelligent and well-liked, and she consistently regarded Nao as disgusting. In her dream, Nao stabbed Reiko's "horrible eye." It felt so natural to Nao that she felt whether she would learn later that Reiko had been killed or had hanged herself in the middle of the night. The following day, Nao cornered Daisuke and asked him how Reiko was doing. According to him, Reiko had reportedly begun covering her left eye with an eye mask. Nao was delighted that she had succeeded in hurting Reiko. She strongly felt that she was now "a breathing ghost."

The book also recounts the 2011 earthquake that shook Japan. The author tries to explain earthquakes in terms of Japanese mythology through Nao's journal.

According to a widely accepted Japanese myth, *Namazu*, a gigantic monster carp fish, created Japan. The God Kashima was the only one who could control this creature (*yokai*). The gigantic carp fish was subdued by Kashima using a massive capstone. *Namazu* escaped from under the capstone whenever the Deity needed to withdraw his power from the rock or take care of other matters, causing earthquakes and tsunamis on the surface. According to the earliest legends, this creature's initial name was "Sakana mono-ju," and it was smaller in size. Sakana mono-ju could interact with

people and even change into one. Those who attempted to kidnap or hurt him would face the worst shame.

Another aspect of culture's reflexive nature is Crow's symbolic usage. Crows play a significant role in Japanese folklore and carry significant metaphorical weight. A well-known folktale portrays crows as the birds of death. Crows are traditionally thought of as spiritual birds that carry spirits. It was thought that when a crow cawed noisily, a death had occurred nearby. These birds are highly valued in Japanese society as they are thought to represent luck, gratitude, wisdom, and divinity. The crow is regarded as one of the most sacred birds in all of Japan and plays a significant role in Japanese mythology. Crows are frequently portrayed as interfering in human matters and serving as reliable guides in myths and legends. The book contains numerous allusions to the large-billed Jungle Crow. The birds have Oliver in awe the most. Oliver had heard the crows making a loud commotion on the day Ruth discovered the freezer bag. He observed them harassing a smaller bird and the enormous crows kept pecking at it, driving it away. When he looked closer at it, Oliver felt that the smaller bird resembled a Japanese crow. He now surmises that the crow and the freezer bag must have floated over. An instance of Ruth's encounter with the crow shows how Ruth unknowingly attributes human characteristics to the crow. Ruth ventures outside in the pouring downpour to get more firewood from their woodpile and Oliver is out in the woods. Suddenly she notices how windy it is and frets about him. Even though she feels silly talking to the Jungle Crow above her, she begs it to find Oliver when she hears it. She finds Oliver the next moment she begged to the crow. In one of Ruth's visions, Haruki #2, Nao's father, is introduced to her in a park after the Jungle Crow directs her there. When Muriel pays Oliver and Ruth a call one day, they notice the Jungle Crow flying towards the deck where they are standing.

Then it abruptly deposits a hazelnut next to them before taking off. The nut becomes trapped between two deck planks. Oliver notices movement under the floorboards as he scoops up the nut. Oliver crawls under the deck and discovers their long-lost cat, Pesto. Crows symbolise the magical connections between the characters in the book that transcends place and time, notably the Jungle Crow that appears outside Ruth's home. The lunch box mysteriously washes up on Ruth's shore in Canada while the Jungle Crow, a species endemic to Japan, inexplicably shows up outside Ruth's house. When Muriel, a companion of Ruth's, learns about the Jungle Crow, she shares the legend of "Grandmother Crow" with them. It is a supernatural crow who could take on human or animal form. According to the Sliammon people, these crows once inhabited their island and was responsible for saving her granddaughter's life. Furthermore, Haruki #1 states that the Jungle Crow might be a manifestation of him since he enjoys flying his aircraft and feels like the "Crow Captain" from a children's book. Ruth recognises Haruki in her dream because the book says that he spends most of his time on a park bench feeding the crows nearby. Crows symbolise the connection that unites the characters of the book from different eras and locations, demonstrating how they are interconnected despite their lack of knowledge about it. When Ruth becomes curious to learn more about Nao's life, she frantically searches the internet for any information pertaining to Nao. After several days of hard work, Ruth comes across Dr Leistiko's website, where she finds a letter mentioning Nao's father, Haruki. Ruth immediately writes to Dr Leistiko, expressing her interest in knowing more about Haruki. Unfortunately, Ruth had to wait for several weeks for his reply. A frustrated Ruth returns to the academic repository, where she discovers an article excerpt on Jiko's fiction and clicks on a link to pay and order the full text of the piece. Ruth is disappointed to learn that this results in a message stating that the paper

has been deleted from the journal's database. Ruth exclaims, "No!" The Jungle Crow, upon hearing her scream shrugs. This could be interpreted as the compassion the bird has for Ruth.

Nao's time at the monastery provides an insight into traditional Japanese society. They frequently bathed in unison. They would frequently beg for salvation while bathing. Prayers of gratitude preceded every action they took. They even "bowed and thanked the toilet," which Nao thought was hilarious. Nao, however, started to pick up on this as well, and one day she was startled when she realised that she was thanking the toilet, and this action felt completely normal to her. Nao, however, was quiet at first with Jiko but gradually began to open up before her. There is a mention of the *Zazen* method. By the close of the summer, Nao felt more physically and mentally strong and felt that she was "becoming a superhero." Nao was inspired by Jiko to practice *Zazen* for several hours and learned how to control her urge to destroy everything around her, including the buzzing mosquitoes. This leading practice of the Zen Buddhist school is usually a form of meditation. Nao thinks that anyone can acquire a "superpower," or "SUPAPAWA." by means of this technique. Ruth is shown trying to practice *Zazen* in the following chapter. *Zazen* practice is another facet of Japanese culture that is present throughout the novel. While being harassed at school, Nao uses *zazen* practice to her advantage as well. In the book, we learn that Nao gains agency by engaging in the common Buddhist discipline of *Zazen*. Nao uses this practice to get strength and inner peace, just like Jiko and other nuns and monks, to overcome the atrocities she encountered in school. The "Panty Incident" portrays this in an obvious manner. Nao experienced her menstruation one day while she was at school. She hurried to the restroom. When she heard scuttling in the restroom adjacent to hers, she saw one of her peers recording Nao on a cell phone.

When Nao attempted to exit the restroom, Reiko and her friends obstructed her way. Daisuke was using a video recorder to capture the entire interaction. Nao's peers used a jump rope to tie her skirt above her head. Nao's face was hidden by her skirt, which prevented her from seeing anything. Her pants were pulled down as she was thrown to the ground by her peers. The sight of bloodstains in her undergarments thrilled them. Moreover, one of them promised to "get more marks." Since they intended to make a rape video, Reiko told Daisuke to rape Nao. Nao heard Daisuke running away as he was too frightened to act. Nao began thinking about Haruki #1 while her peers were debating who could rape her, and these ideas gave her courage. She began Zazen after calling upon her "superpower."

The diary serves as a medium of cultural memory that connects Ruth to Nao and the Japanese culture. Ruth, the novelist was forced to relocate to Oliver's island considering his state of health as the cost of healthcare in the United States was too high for them. In addition, Ruth's mother suffered from Alzheimer's and was residing in a Connecticut facility. Ruth was unsure about how to care for her ill mother and her chronically ill spouse. Therefore, she decided to relocate to Oliver's island with her mother. Ruth quickly identified that the island life was dissimilar from her previous experiences. Ruth too faces an identity crisis like Nao. We find a disillusioned Ruth who questions whether she should leave the island she thought would be her home because she feels her life is passing her by. For Ruth, leaving home means moving back to the city, whereas in the Buddhist context, "home leaving" refers to giving up the material world to become a monk or nun. This is covered in the Shobogenzo chapter "The Merits of Home-Leaving" by Zen Master Dogen. He claims that every moment, no matter how brief it is, offers the chance to "wake up and choose actions that will create beneficial karma." The real lesson of Dogen is that "life is ephemeral."

"Wake up now! / And now! / And now!" he commands his followers (Ozeki 62). Ruth uses Buddhist philosophy to explain her predicament on the island. Also, through the diary, Ruth could connect with Nao in terms of the cultural alienation that they both encountered.

The history of the death poem can be traced back to East Asian customs, notably Zen Buddhism. A death poem was typically written by a person on their deathbed, such as a Zen teacher or a warrior, to capture their very individual and vivid perspective of life. Jiko only scribbled the *kanji* "to survive" on paper. She then collapsed to the ground and died. It was clear to Nao and her father that it was a statement for them. When someone passes away in Japan, everything must be done backwards and upside down. To ensure that the elderly Jiko was not bound to this world, Muji and Nao dressed her in a unique pure white kimono that Maji had sewed for her without tying any knots in the thread. They laid her out with her head facing north as opposed to south and crossed her kimono right over left, which is the opposite of how a living individual would wear it. To assist her in cutting her last remaining ties to the outside world, Muji placed a small knife on her chest. The novel clearly portrays the traditional practices involved in Japanese funerals and shows how meaningful each practice is.

Memory is a form of social contact and communication. Culture can be passed down from one generation to the next and from one circumstance to another. Memory affects how we behave, what we do, and how we recall the past. A culture transmits memory in its specific historical, social, and political setting. Literature is a form of cultural memory that includes the information stored in culture's memory banks, recording tools, and a body of commemorative actions. Writing is a memory function and a contemporary method of interpreting writings intended to create cultural

memory. The function of literature in society is linked to the earlier cultures and is developed through a method of remembering.

Chapter 3

Autobiographical Memory in *A Tale for the Time Being*

"I'm reaching forward through time to touch you... you're reaching back to touch me"(Ozeki 37)

Autobiographical memory is a complex synthesis of recollections of specific, recurring, and extended events combined into a compelling narrative that has been self-created and assessed through sociocultural practices. To account for individual, gendered, and cultural variations in adults' autobiographical memories, specific social and cultural contexts must be considered. The self-benefits from autobiographical memory occurs in four different manners: it shapes our conduct in the future, builds and sustains a social network, creates a stable sense of self, and aids in coping with undesirable emotions and experiences. Ruth's book *A Tale for the Time Being* introduces the character Nao, who goes through the pain and discomfort of leaving her home in Silicon Valley after her father loses his job, compelling her family to move back to Japan. Writing her journal and addressing a fictitious audience of readers and friends offers Nao comfort. However, Nao gets preoccupied while writing the journal and successfully documents her life for readers. She frequently interjects to talk to the reader and to send texts to her grandmother. She also jumps back in time to describe events that happened in the distant past. She alleviates all her problems as Jiko teaches her Zazen (Zen Buddhist meditation) as a coping technique that enables her to develop the psychological fortitude required to handle stressful situations. Nao develops a deep bond with Japan through the efforts of Jiko. Thus, Nao's problematic past and subsequent healing positively affect her present and future. It enables her to connect with her dad and overcome her traumatic experiences. Since they are more self-referential than sequential memories, autobiographical memories typically last

longer. We process information and events about the self, more thoroughly, improving a better recall. A better recall is produced because of a more complex and deeply encoded memory trace.

The novel illustrates the three levels of autobiographical memory. The "life story" structure is the most abstract stage. The life narrative includes broad factual and subjective information about the subject. Additionally, it might include self-images that divide and separate the person into various selves. The way the various self-images hold cues that access other information in the autobiographical knowledge base differently, may support these divisions. For instance, a self that uses a specific lifetime will have cues channelled by knowledge represented as a lifetime period. These cues can then be used to access certain general sets of events that contain cues to episodic memories. After losing his work in America, Nao's software programmer father had to move his family to Japan from Silicon Valley. Haruki #2 is unable to find work in Tokyo, and the family currently resides in a small, dilapidated flat. He attempts to jump before a train to end his life as he feels terrible for upsetting Nao and Tomoko, his wife. However, he is saved. The following day, Haruki stops leaving the flat and soon turns into a social recluse. After reading Haruki #1's secret French diary, Haruki discusses his guilt for being unable to support his daughter and wife during the most troubling times of their life in an email to Dr Leistiko in an honest discussion with Nao. She also opens up about the severe bullying she experienced during her junior high school years when other students made embarrassing videos of her and shared them online:

When I saw these, I cried many tears. I was very angry! As her father, it is my duty to keep my daughter safe, but I failed to keep her so. I was like a blind man, too selfish because I couldn't see, and only my concern was for

myself... "I let you down," he said. "I was twisted up with my guilt. I wasn't there for you when you really needed me. (Ozeki 388)

Due to Haruki #1's failure to defend his daughter, Nao endured horrendous bullying at her Japanese school, which had a negative impact on both the family's contentment and Nao's academic performance. As she was resolved not to portray herself as the victim of a system that appeared to be founded on a collective psychosis, her feelings of loneliness and alienation had led her to consider suicide. Nao considered her journal to be an extensive suicide letter.

While lifetime periods are closer in the hierarchy to representations of experience than general events, general events are more event-specific and, like lifetime periods, contain knowledge about goals, others, places, activities, and evaluations. When her father loses his work, and her family is forced to relocate back to Tokyo, Nao feels the pain and discomfort of leaving her home in Silicon Valley. Although Nao feels alienated in her new environment and finds it difficult to relate to the Japanese aspect of her identity, she identifies as an American. She describes herself as "an ordinary California girl adopted by Japanese parents". The only solace Nao can find from her depressing feelings is her great-grandmother Jiko. Nao spends the summer in Sendai with her grandma. Jiko shows Nao how to "sit zazen," or meditate, to support her while she is bullied at school. When Nao meditates, she frees her mind of all thoughts and concentrates only on her breathing, allowing her to be fully present at the moment. In Jiko's words, Zazen practice is "to enter time completely." Nao refers to this as her "superpower," which she uses to combat the horrendous abuse she endures at school. Nao learns more about her family background while she is in Sendai and discovers her great-uncle's involvement in World War II.

Haruki #2 and Nao had perused the translation of Haruki #1's French diary after Jiko's funeral. They were taken aback when Haruki #1 revealed that he intended to fly his aircraft into the ocean rather than directly at the enemy's warship. When Haruki #2 worked in America, he also experienced comparable circumstances. A software interface that Haruki#2 had created was being sold to a military contractor by his company. Given how vehemently Haruki objected to this, he was dismissed. The secret French diary of Haruki #1 brought back recollections of Haruki #2's time in Silicon Valley. He was fired from his well-paying work despite having done a great deed by speaking out against a destructive software. The ensuing family problems caused him to question his decisions and made him feel bad for not being able to support his family. According to Nao, the noble Haruki #1 had nothing in common with her father, who she thought was pitiful as he sat around the house creating paper bugs. Haruki #2 appeared to be deeply wounded by Nao's critical judgment of him, but he accepted it subtly and agreed with her. After learning the real cause of Haruki #1's death, Haruki #2 mustered up the courage to discuss how he lost his employment. The knowledge alters her perception of her father for the fact that he positively contributed to society. Nao thought her father was a "superhero" for standing up for his beliefs, and she realised how wrong she had been about him all along. After realising this, she could stop thinking about ending her life and instead became inspired to live life to the utmost.

Oh, please don't let that stupid Lexus careen out over, or that crazy hentai burusera salaryman with the comb-over stab me with a penknife, or that guy all dressed in white who looks like a cult terrorist drop a bag of sarin gas in my subway car... at least not until I've finished writing old Jiko's life! I can't

die until I do that. I have to live! I don't want to die! I don't want to die! (Ozeki 390)

Additionally, this insight allowed Nao to assist her father in starting an internet start-up that dealt with online security and digital encryption. He borrowed the concept from Nao, who suffered severe bullying and had several of her peers publicly humiliate her online. Nao was relieved that she could start over in Montreal after Haruki#2 created a computer software referred to as a "spider" that crawled through the internet and eliminated all traces of her. As a result, this had a favourable impact on Nao and her father. Clusters of recollections frequently emerge in General Events that emphasise achieving or underachieving individual objectives. Just as how Nao had hoped her reader should be, Ruth developed a deep connection with Nao and became deeply invested in her life and stories as she read through her journal. "Ruth looked at the sturdy red book with its tarnished gilt title embossed on the cover. It was lying on top of a tall messy stack of notes and manuscript pages, bristling with Post-its and wound with cramped marginalia, which represented the memoir that she'd been working on for close to a decade" (Ozeki 31). Whenever Ruth attempted to reread and edit her memoir, she felt "inexplicably sleepy." It had been about a year since she added a single word to it. Ruth believed that both she and Oliver are wasting their lives. One day Ruth sets out to write her memoir one. She resolved to time to work for thirty uninterrupted minutes. Ruth, however, becomes preoccupied with the watch itself and begins attempting to read the *kanji* symbols etched on its back. Ruth feels terrible for not finishing the memoir she had been working on for the past ten years. After being inspired by the diary, Ruth attempts to finish the memoir but eventually fails. Ruth's particular objective of finishing the memoir is thus not achieved.

Thirdly, vivid recollections of particular events are centered in ESK memories. ESK memories centre on certain occurrences that serve as powerful recalls of what happened. ESK memories begin with a high level of information but this rapidly wears off as certain memories stick out. The bust of the internet boom at the end of the twentieth century and the terrorist assault on the World Trade Centre in September 2001 are two significant events that punctuate Nao's narrative. They are symbolic of the failure of late capitalism. Nao views the financial crisis and a major historical event as important mnemonics in her family's financial and personal fortunes. Ozeki draws readers' attention to the historical inaccuracies throughout the entire book. There is no better example of this than how September 11th is handled in the book; it serves as an instance of a turning point, a "sharp knife slicing through time" that "changed everything" for those who were living to witness it. (Ozeki 265).

It is interesting to note that most of Ruth and Nao's narrative memories of this "American" tragedy are expressed outside of the boundaries of the US. As Ruth and Nao's memories eerily resemble Haruki #1's journals, it provides a counter-narrative to the American nationalist account of 9/11. Nao's memory of September 11th serves as an illustration of this. While watching the television footage from Japan, she and her father are mesmerised by the people jumping from the burning towers. These individuals, especially the image of the Falling Man, would play a significant role in the national patriotic 9/11 story as a representation of bravery and fortitude in the face of unfathomable evil. The highly romanticised language used to describe Falling Man's death in the media is similar to that used by the Japanese to describe kamikaze missions. These pilots were said to embody the "fighting spirit" of the imperial army, and there was something poetic about tying "a cloth around my forehead, branded with the rising sun, and tak[ing] to the sky." (Ozeki 217). In order to imagine the

"you" who exists parallel to "me," even if that "you" lives in a different temporality, national, or linguistic realm, readers are encouraged to read for such gaps and absences and creatively "fill in" these spaces. In the book, Ozeki assumes the character of Ruth and tells the story of Nao's diary's opening. This arrangement reframes the narrative by placing Ruth in the same setting as the author, Ozeki. When Ruth married Oliver, she left Manhattan and relocated to the island. Ruth feels dislocated and confined to the island despite having moved voluntarily. Due to this dislocation, she experiences writer's block. She has been drafting a memoir for the past ten years about her mother, who had Alzheimer's. Ruth currently dislikes this project but believes she has put too much time and effort into it to give up on it. Ruth is relieved to find Nao's journal when it comes ashore. Like Nao, Ruth has resided in Japan and America and is familiar with both cultures.

As Ruth Ozeki wrote a nearly identical version of herself as the co-protagonist, she even allowed her personal and family life to intertwine with the narrative, making the book autobiographical. When Ozeki believed the book was ready to be published in 2007, a devastating earthquake and Tsunami struck Japan, forever altering the country's landscape. Thus, Ozeki changed the text of the novel. In the updated version, the journal is unintentionally found by a novelist named Ruth Ozeki after being carried by the Tsunami to the British Columbian coast. Throughout Ozeki's story, the concepts of doubt and change are pervasive. They existed before the significant rewrite she carried out before the Tsunami, but they became much more noticeable with her additional work. The book Ozeki had written before the tsunami "just wasn't relevant anymore," she first concluded. Eventually, Ozeki included the Tsunami, which altered the novel's plot. Ozeki decided to "Take the fictional container and break it" as the narrative switched from being set in a world without the

Tsunami to one where it had totally altered it. This gave her the freedom to act on her intuition and make herself one of the central characters.

According to Ozeki (Confessions 39), Tale is an "I-novel," a Japanese autobiographical genre that combines real-life events with fictional ones. "Ruth's writing in the book shifts from a focus on the self (like a memoir) to a study of the self through others (like an I-novel): when she comes across Nao's journal, her life branches into Nao's tales and is subject to change. The network of Nao and Ruth's ideas, feelings, and memories clarifies the mutually constructing forces of a self and others. Ruth Ozeki, the author, and Ruth, the fictional character, both have husbands called Oliver and the same mother, Masako. Both of their mothers have Alzheimer's disease. Like Ruth in the book, the author split her time between New York City and an isolated island in Canada's Desolation Sound. Both are of Japanese descent and are very knowledgeable about Japanese history and society. The protagonist, Ruth, has been stuck in a ten-year writing project about caring for her mother who battled Alzheimer's illness. Since 2003, Ruth Ozeki has not released a novel. Ozeki was initiated as a Zen Buddhist priest in 2010. Additionally, they vary from one another. Ruth is a different character with different experiences and a more constrained viewpoint. In contrast, author Ozeki had become an ordained Zen Buddhist priest three years before its release. In addition to her usual motifs, Buddhism significantly impacts this book. For instance, the character Ruth learns about Zen meditation from Nao. According to Ozeki, the narratives one tells about their experiences are frequently thought to be more "real" (perceived by the audience as more authentic or valid) than the kinds of stories in a book. However, she thinks these fictional accounts are just as genuine as any other ones. According to Ozeki, one's identity comprises the various stories one decides to convey about themselves. Each story's tone, significant

themes, and prominent characters evolve and are influenced by conscious and unconscious reflections. She claims that her experience producing documentaries and television has shown her the difficulties in claiming to reflect "the truth," so she writes fiction rather than nonfiction. Ruth has been working on a memoir about her late mother's progression through Alzheimer's disease for the past ten years, while Nao is struggling with the mystery of her own life.

Ruth and Oliver felt uncomfortable reading about the hikikomori in Nao's journal because they live as hermits on their island. Ruth believes that transformations occur in "a world far away." Only the "world far away" seems to change, while everything on Ruth's lonely island remains the same, making her feel isolated from the rest of the world. As a result, Ruth feels she is wasting her time as a "recluse" on the island, cut off from change and, consequently, from exhilaration and advancement. Ruth's name frequently serves as a portent, casting a complicated shadow over her existence. Ruth is derived from the Middle English term 'rue', which means 'regret' or 'remorse'. Ruth frequently experienced oppression due to the meaning of her name, not just in English. The name was similarly problematic in Japanese. 'R' and 'th' are difficult for Japanese speakers to articulate. Ruth is either rendered 'rush', which means "not at home", or "absent," or 'rutsu', which means "roots." It precisely captures the character's characteristics. Ruth has been attempting valiantly for years to establish a connection with her hometown of Desolation Point, but she has never felt as at home there as her husband Oliver does. "When Ruth first saw these giant trees, she wept. They rose up around her, ancient time beings, towering a hundred or two hundred feet overhead. At five feet, five inches, she had never felt so puny in all her life" (Ozeki 59). She missed New York City's built surroundings. She could only find her place in human time and history in an urban

setting, surrounded by buildings and straight lines. She required this as a novelist. She was lonely. She missed the drama, intrigue, and power conflicts of people. She required her species not so much to converse with as to observe or be a bystander in a crowd. Since Nao's name means "now" in English, Nao has battled with the name's changing connotations for years. These people do not feel comfortable in their own skin. They appear to live in stages and when things get particularly unpleasant, they may compartmentalise their experiences.

When Nao's journal is found, Ruth is captivated by the narrative. She is profoundly concerned about the Yasutani family's story and feels genuine compassion for their suffering. Even though both space and time separate Ruth and Nao, the former starts to notice a particular connection between them. As a result, she observed numerous indicators Japanese culture, whereby the novelist is prompted to re-evaluate her entire life and profession by the diary. Language and narrative are crucial for the development of autobiographical memory. Language enables us to share our ideas and feelings about events with others and enables them to do the same. According to Bruner, this is how narratives change from the "landscape of actions" to the "landscape of consciousness." (99). Through narratives, people can share another's viewpoint on a previous incident. Through sharing the experiences of our lives with others, we develop a more nuanced knowledge of both these events and of ourselves.

Understanding how others see the past and how it differs from and is similar to our ideas and emotions helps us develop a subjective perspective on the past. As a result, over time, we create a sense of who we are by conversing with others about the past and pondering together. The relationship between the Ruth-Nao duo and the Haruki#1–Haruki#2 duo can be used to trace this feature of autobiographical memory. Ruth is not confronted by Nao and is unaware of how she intervened in Nao's

chronology. However, the narrative is structured as a discussion between two women who are looking for their place in the universe. Ruth chooses to read Nao's diary slowly because she wants to get the full effect of what Nao experienced while she was writing it. Ruth also believes she will have time to focus on her own writing if she does not rush through the diary. Ruth has a dream that night of a Japanese nun using a computer in a dimly lit chamber of a crumbling temple. The nun has thick spectacles that resemble Ruth's and is dressed in dark robes with a shaved head. Ruth notices that the nun is entering "Sometimesup / Sometimesdown," which she interprets as a response to the query Nao texted Jiko about the destination of the enlightenment elevator's passengers. Jiko almost seemed to be responding to her, she thought. "Well, it was like old Jiko was texting me the message, too, only telepathically. Is that crazy?"(Ozeki 230)

Ruth decides to perform zazen after reading about Nao's method. Ruth responds that her entire existence is like a nap that she needs to wake up from when Oliver suggests that she might be trying too hard to master zazen. She claims that Nao was sent to her by the universe and that she sincerely wishes to follow Nao's advice in order to develop her "superpower." "I need something. I need a supapawa." She closed her eyes again. Her mind was her power. She wanted her mind back". (Ozeki 185)

Ruth admired Nao's style of writing. She could picture the purple ink scripting the lines into substantial chunks of colourful paragraphs in her mind's eye. She could not help but admire the girl's free-flowing language. Very rarely she had second thoughts. She rarely substituted one phrase for another. Only a few lines and sentences were crossed out which gave Ruth feelings of awe. She had not approached the page with such assurance in years. The fascination with the journal eventually

veers close to obsession. The author beautifully portrays Ruth's obsession through the description of her state of mind where she massaged her temples and her eye sockets with her palms as she had the impression that she had been using all of her willpower and the rigidity of her eyes to try to draw the girl out of the bright screen. It was essential to her. She needed to know whether Nao was living or not. She was trying to find a corpse. Ruth wished she had done more to honour her mother's departure after reading about Nao's account of Jiko's funeral following Japanese custom. Ruth began to behave possessively toward Nao's belongings as a result of her obsession with her diary. The following two incidents are indicators of Ruth's possessiveness over Nao's diary. When Ruth's friend Muriel, a retired anthropologist, came to examine the barnacles on the freezer bag, Ruth became upset by how she handled the book. "Watching Muriel handle the book, Ruth felt her uneasiness grow" (Ozeki 33). Yet again, Ruth becomes upset over the panty incident. "The night Ruth read a passage about perverts and panties and the zebra-skin bed, she felt a sudden flush of discomfort. It wasn't embarrassment. She was never shy about this kind of thing, herself. Rather, her discomfort was more on behalf of the girl. She was feeling protective. But she needn't have worried" (Ozeki 35).

Ruth's husband becomes worried about Ruth's obsession with Nao's diary. Ruth searches for "Haruki Yasutani" in haste but cannot locate any information on a computer programmer or a kamikaze pilot. Ruth is pleased that she has not discovered Haruki or Tomoko among the Yasutanis who were reported missing or killed in the earthquake and Tsunami. She searches for Jiko Yasutani and Zen shrines but is once more unsuccessful. Finally, she searches for "Chuo Rapid Express" but accidentally types "Harryki" instead of "Haruki" into the search field. She is astonished to discover Dr Leistiko's website, from which she learns specific details about Haruki #1.

"She searched the Internet for Haruki Yasutani, cross-referencing his name with every search term she could recall from Nao's diary: sky, soldier, kamikaze, she held the watch philosophy, French poetry, Tokyo University. No luck. She moved on to the second Haruki, inputting new keywords: computer programmer, origami, Sunnyvale, but although she came up with a few Yasutanis, a couple of Harukis, and a handful of tech industry people with one of those names, she found none with both names and none who appeared to be related to either the kamikaze pilot or his nephew, Nao's father". (Ozeki 85-86)

Ruth worries about Nao's future when her life is in danger. Ruth also discovers that the pages that follow are vacant. "Ruth turned the page, felt her heart miss a beat. The page was blank. She turned another. Blank. And the page after that"(Ozeki 342). During one of her dreams, Ruth performs a supernatural intervention in Nao's life, altering her un-empathetic behaviour towards her dad. The following morning, when she checked the journal, Ruth discovered that Nao had added an entirely new entry about old Jiko's passing, the funeral, and her reconciliation with her father.

Ruth's entry into Nao's life through her is described as: "The boughs part then, revealing a path that winds and twists, growing narrower and narrower, leading her into an ever-thickening forest" (Ozeki 346). This demonstrates Ruth's capacity to "push through" the barrier separating her reality from that of Nao's journal, just as Nao can do the same with the barrier created by miscommunication and lack of understanding separating her from her father. Nao has read a version of her great-great uncle's journal that he censored so that he would not be labelled a traitor after his death when Ruth suddenly appears in Nao's world at that point in the narrative. The censored version informs Nao that her pacifist progenitor pursues his goal with

stoic resolve. The uncensored version, penned in French to be incomprehensible to his military superiors, tells a very different tale. With her father's aid, Nao translated this diary and learnt that their ancestor did not wish to support a war that he detested and did not want to cause any more suffering, even for his so-called enemy. This is made possible by Ruth's ability to magically transport the letters to where Nao can find them. "When I read this, I felt a little bit ashamed, actually. I remembered how I used to ambush Daisuke-kun and beat him up, and also how I went forth as a living ghost to stab my enemy Reiko in the eye. I started to feel so bad about this, I decided I would apologise if I ever saw them again, which I probably won't" (Ozeki 386). Nao is inspired for the first time to feel empathy for her hostile classmates by Haruki #1's kindness toward foreign enemies he has never encountered. She "felt sorry for them," and she leaves the classroom for the final time only after delivering deep Buddhist bows to both her teacher and her peers (Ozeki 288). This shows her capacity to put her feelings of enmity below her respect for them as fellow humans.

Additionally, the author develops personalities through clever symbolic connections. The descendants of Haruki #1 (Nao's great uncle) and Haruki #2 (Nao's father) clearly illustrate this, carrying on the predecessor's peaceful awareness and goals. Haruki #1 studied philosophy at Tokyo University before being a kamikaze pilot. Philosophy even piqued the attention of Haruki #2. Another similarity between them is that Haruki #2 makes two efforts at suicide after Haruki #1 turns into a suicide bomber. According to Nao, "So I guess you could say that suicide and philosophy run in the family, at least among the Harukis" (Ozeki 68).

Using Nao's diary, author Ruth Ozeki could communicate with readers across the divide between their virtual and real worlds.

In reality, every reader, while he is reading, is the reader of his self. The writer's work is merely a kind of optical instrument, which he offers to the reader to permit him to discern what, without the book, he would perhaps never have seen in himself. The reader's recognition in his own self of what the book says is the proof of its truth -Marcel Proust, *Le temps retrouvé* (Ozeki 109).

According to this quotation, a writer's responsibility is to convey meaning and understanding to their audience, which can aid in the latter's self-discovery. In the same way that Nao's journal alters Ruth's perceptions, a writer can enrich the lives of his or her readers. Nao writes in her journal to an unidentified "you" who she hopes will read and comprehend her words in the future. Nao opens up to the audience about her worries and emotions. I don't know why I keep asking you questions. It's not like I expect you to answer, and even if you did answer, how would I know? But maybe that doesn't matter. Maybe when I ask you a question like "You doing okay?" you should just tell me, even if I can't hear you, and then I'll just sit here and imagine what you might say (Ozeki 175). Nao emphasises the closeness between writer and viewer by describing her reader as her "friend. "You might say, "Sure thing, Nao. I'm okay. I'm doin' just fine." "Okay, awesome," I would say to you, and then we would smile at each other across time like we were friends, because we are friends by now, aren't we? And because we're friends, here's something else I will share with you. It's kind of personal, but it's really helped me out a lot (Ozeki 175).

The book inspires the reader to re-evaluate and reframe how the characters relate to one another over time and place. The book shows how the characters are affected by other characters' autobiographical memories and how those memories can

positively or negatively affect a character's life. It also creates a more profound link between the main characters.

Conclusion

The novel *A Tale for the Time Being* by Ruth Ozeki gives a detailed account of how cultural memory and autobiographical memory play a crucial role in the lives of its central characters. The book narrates the tale of a sixteen-year-old Japanese girl called Nao Yasutani and a Canadian author named Ruth, who are connected by a diary. Through the alternative narration of its central characters, Nao and Ruth, the novel deals with their relationship getting strengthened through the medium of a diary such that Nao and Ruth influence each other's lives in a significant manner. The way the narrative leaps around in time ties the two writers together and gives them the courage to face their anxieties and start living again. The novel is a repertoire of Japanese culture explored through the narration of Nao in the form of her diary. The narrative of Nao spans several generations and includes tales of her suicide-attempted father, her great-grandmother Jiko, a Buddhist nun, and her late grand-uncle Haruki #1, a kamikaze pilot. The "time being" in the novel's title is a concept taken from *Shobogenzo*, written by an ancient Buddhist Zen master named Dogen Zenji. Although the actual purpose of Nao's diary was to record the life of her great-grandmother, a Buddhist nun, feminist, and poet, the journal is primarily about Nao and her father as they battle to cope with the harsh realities of their lives in Japan. Nao's life is symbolic of a person torn between two cultures. Nao, American by heart but Japanese by lineage, is forced to relocate to Japan after her father loses his job and most of his savings after the dot-com bubble burst. She finds it difficult to relate to the Japanese part of her identity due to her exposure to Japanese culture. As a result, she is bullied by her classmates. She feels out of place and contemplates suicide. Her father, in a similar way, makes several attempts to kill himself as he is swallowed up by the guilt of not being able to provide for his family. Her grand uncle Haruki #1, a

kamikaze pilot, flew his plane into the ocean instead of an American battleship he was supposed to destroy as her abhorred violence. Their attempts to end life itself are rooted in the Japanese culture, as suicide is considered an honourable way to die in this culture.

Other references to cultural memory in the novel include the great Samurai warriors of Japanese culture, famous Japanese myths, the symbolism of Crow, standard Buddhist Zen practices and Buddhist funeral rituals. The book also recounts the 2011 earthquake that shook Japan. The author tries to explain earthquakes in terms of Japanese mythology through Nao's journal. The book contains numerous allusions to the large-billed Jungle Crow. Crows symbolise the magical connections between the characters in the book that transcends place and time, notably the Jungle Crow that appears outside Ruth's home. Crows play a significant role in Japanese folklore. In Japanese culture, crows are considered the birds of death, reliable guides, and sacred and spiritual birds that carry spirits. Buddhist Zen cultural practices like Zazen or meditation are of great importance in the novel.

The diary serves as a medium of cultural memory that connects Ruth to Nao and the Japanese culture. Ruth, the novelist, was forced to relocate to Oliver's island, considering his state of health as the cost of healthcare in the United States was too high for them. In addition, Ruth's mother suffered from Alzheimer's and resided in a Connecticut facility. Ruth was unsure about how to care for her ill mother and her chronically ill spouse. Therefore, she decided to relocate to Oliver's island with her mother. Ruth quickly identified that the island life was dissimilar from her previous experiences. Ruth, too faces an identity crisis like Nao. The aspect of culture as a "monument" proposed by Aleida Assmann brings together individuals from various generations rather than just one generation. The foundation of this traditional practice

is communication with the ancestors. This aspect focuses on reconstructing the life worlds, specific meaning structures, and personal experiences through historical records and other unintentional media.

Through Jiko's life, Nao explains the common everyday rituals of Zen priests, such as begging for salvation in every action they perform. The novel portrays the rituals involved in the funeral of Jiko, the Buddhist Zen. The history of the death poem mentioned in the novel can be traced back to East Asian customs, notably Zen Buddhism. The novel proves that literature is a form of cultural memory that includes the information stored in culture's memory banks, recording tools, and a body of commemorative actions. For established cultural knowledge to be improved, it can be passed down from generation to generation so that each generation can benefit from the knowledge of its content. Literature plays a crucial part in cultural memory.

The novel is told from the alternative narration of Nao and Ruth. Their narration includes memories of significant personal events and experiences. We also find that the character Ruth who initially reads Nao's diary as a distraction from the memoir she is writing about her mother, soon gets caught up in Nao's story and becomes worried about Nao. She struggles to find any evidence that Nao and her family are real. It also influences Ruth's life. Ruth's life parallels that of Nao. The autobiographical memory plays a crucial role in sketching the character arcs of the central characters. The novel is interpreted based on the three important levels of autobiographical memory. The first level or lifetime period locates one period of time in a person's life. In the novel, Nao's troublesome life after returning to Japan can be considered a lifetime. The second level, or the General events, refers to one general event in a life period that is life changing. Nao's stay at Jiko's monastery is shown to impact Nao's life significantly. The third level, or the Event Specific Knowledge

encompasses a short-lived specific incident that directs the characters' behaviour in the present, such as the 9/11 incident, the tsunami in Japan and World War II. These incidents are shown to have a ceaseless effect on the novel's central characters. The novel is told through the alternative narration of Nao and Ruth. Their narration includes memories of significant personal events and experiences. The development of autobiographical recollection depends on language and narrative. Bruner's concept of narratives changing from the "landscape of actions" to the "landscape of consciousness." (99) is important here. Through narratives, people can share their viewpoints on a previous incident and the experiences of their lives with others. Hence, we develop a more nuanced knowledge of these events and ourselves. It helps us in developing a subjective perspective on the past. As a result, over time, we create a sense of who we are by conversing with others about the past and pondering together. The relationship between the Ruth-Nao duo and the Haruki#1-Haruki#2 duo can be used to understand this feature of autobiographical memory. Nao does not confront Ruth, but she intervenes in Nao's chronology through the dream-altering life of Nao. The author brings out similarities between Ruth and Nao. Like Nao, Ruth has resided in Japan and America, so she is acquainted with both cultures. Ruth feels isolated from the rest of the world due to the geographic seclusion and rural setting of her home, just like Nao feels alienated in her Japanese school as a result of her hybrid cultural identity. Analysing the novel in the light of autobiographical memory also suggests another similarity between Ruth and Nao. Throughout the novel, Nao addresses an unidentified "you" who she feels will read and comprehend her words in the future. Nao opens up to the audience about her worries and emotions. Similarly, Ruth communicates with readers and Nao across the divide between their virtual and real worlds.

The novel can also be called partially autobiographical as the life of the character Ruth in the novel parallels with the author Ruth Ozeki. Like the character Ruth, Ruth Ozeki, the author lives on a remote island in Canada with her husband, Oliver, an environmental artist. To emphasise the book's metafictional (self-referential) elements, Ozeki used Ruth as a proxy for herself. Ozeki claims in an interview that this book shows how a character like Nao can contact a novelist like Ruth through time and space. Ozeki mentions in an interview that this book demonstrates how a character like Nao can contact a writer like Ruth through time and space. Thus, the novel resembles an "I-novel," a Japanese autobiographical genre that combines real-life events with fictional ones. When Ruth discovers Nao's journal, her life spreads into Nao's tales and is susceptible to change. Ruth's writing in the book switches from an emphasis on the self (like a journal) to an inquiry of the self by means of others (like an I-novel).

The novel helps the readers realise that everything considered different and unconnected is connected in one way or another. The concept of time being used in the novel also suggests how a powerful tool time can become in unifying people belonging to different times and cultures. The connection is established through memories either through the occurrence of similar events in the characters' lives or through the transfer of certain cultural elements belonging to a particular cultural group. In the novel, we find that the connection between Ruth and Nao, separated by time and space, is united through words, memories, and thoughts. Ozeki portrays memories as an instrument capable of counteracting the agency of time.

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