

**Intersectionality in Feminism and the Book *Memoirs of a Geisha***



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and Literature*

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### **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this project titled “Intersectionality of Feminism and the book *Memoirs of a Geisha*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Mrs. Athira Babu, Professor, Department of English.

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The term “Intersectionality” which is central to intersectionality feminism was coined by legal scholar and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Crenshaw used the term to explain how different social categories, such as race, gender and class, intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination and oppression. Crenshaw initially focused on the experiences of Black women, whose oppression through the lens of racism and sexism alone.

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## Introduction

Feminism is a social, political and ideological movement advocating for gender equality. It seeks to address and dismantle systematic inequalities, discrimination and stereotypes that disadvantage women and marginalized genders. Feminism promotes equal rights, opportunities and representation in areas such as education employment, politics and personal autonomy.

It's about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledge and strengths, and striving to empower all women to realise their full rights.

It's about levelling the playing field between genders, and ensuring that diverse women and girls have the same opportunities in life available to boys and men.

Feminism is not about hating men; it's about advocating for gender justice and dismantling patriarchal structures that harm everyone, including men. There are also different feminist perspectives, such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, and intersectional feminism, each with unique focuses and strategies.

Intersectionality in feminism is the idea that different aspects of a person's identity—such as race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and more—intersect and create unique experiences of discrimination or privilege. It recognizes that oppression is not one-dimensional and that factors like racism, classism, and ableism can compound gender inequality.

The term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how Black women face overlapping forms of discrimination that cannot be understood by looking at sexism or racism alone. For example, a white woman and a Black woman may both face sexism, but the Black woman may also experience racism, creating a different and often more severe form of oppression.

Intersectionality is important in feminism because It ensures feminism is inclusive and acknowledges the diverse experiences of all women and marginalized genders.

It highlights that issues like workplace discrimination, healthcare access, and violence affect people differently based on multiple social factors.

Feminism in pre-World War II Japan (late 19th century to the 1930s) was shaped by modernization, Western influence, and resistance to patriarchal traditions. While Japanese women fought for education, legal rights, and political participation, their efforts were often suppressed by state policies that reinforced traditional gender roles.

Pre-World War II Japanese feminism, influenced by Western ideas after the Meiji Restoration, saw women advocating for their rights, including suffrage and education, while grappling with traditional gender roles and Confucian norms that emphasized "good wives and wise mothers".

The feminist movement in pre world 2 Japan was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Women faced a rang of challenges and opportunities, and their experience were shaped by intersecting factors such as gender class and race. Despite the challenges passed by militarism and nationalism, the feminist movement in Japan left a lasting legacy and it played a crucial role in shaping moder Japanese society and culture.

*Memoirs of a Geisha* is a book written by the author Arthur Sulzberger golden who's born in December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1956 is an American writer. *Memoirs of a Geisha* is a historical fiction novel published in 1997. The novel, told in the first person perspective, tells the story of Nitta Sayuri and the many trials she faces on the path to becoming and working as a *geisha* in Kyoto, japan, before during and World War 2. Much of the novel is set in the popular *geisha* district of Gion in Kyoto and contains reference to actual places frequented by *geisha* and their partrons such as the Ichiriki Ochaya an historical tea house with the history of 300 years called as *ochaya* in Kyoto, located at the southeast corner of Shijo Street and Hanami Lane, its entrance right at the heart of the gion kobu Distric.

Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golden presents a nuanced depiction of feminism through its protagonist, Sayuri, and her journey in a male-dominated society. While the novel is not explicitly feminist, it highlights themes of female resilience, agency, and the struggles of women in a patriarchal culture.

Women in the novel, particularly geisha, have little control over their lives. Sayuri is sold to an okiya (geisha house) as a child, where she must follow strict rules and endure harsh treatment.

Despite this, Sayuri navigates the system to gain some control over her destiny, demonstrating resilience and intelligence.



Geisha are trained to entertain men, and their worth is often determined by male patrons. Sayuri's virginity is auctioned off, reinforcing the commodification of women.

However, some geisha, like Mameha, use their skills to secure financial independence, showing that women can find ways to exercise power within the system

While rivalry exists, the novel also highlights the importance of female mentorship. Mameha helps Sayuri succeed, showing that women can uplift each other even in a competitive environment.

Sayuri's ultimate goal is to be with the Chairman, but her life is largely shaped by external forces. The novel critiques the idea that women's choices are often constrained by societal expectations.

While *Memoirs of a Geisha* does not present an overtly feminist message, it portrays the resilience of women in a system designed to limit them. Sayuri's journey reflects the struggles of women who must navigate societal restrictions while seeking autonomy. The novel raises questions about gender roles, power, and the ways women survive and adapt in patriarchal societies.

The concept of intersectional feminism—which examines how overlapping social identities (such as race, class, and gender) create unique experiences of oppression—can be applied to *Memoirs of a Geisha* to analyze how Sayuri and other female characters navigate a society shaped by multiple layers of power and discrimination.

## Chapter 1

### Understanding Intersectionality In Feminism

The goal of feminism is to define and establish the political, economic, personal and social equality of the sexes through a variety of social movements and ideas. It recognizes and opposes patriarchal structures—such as customs, organizations, and social norms—that uphold gender inequality by giving preference to the knowledge and authority of men. Activism and advocacy efforts are part of feminism, which aims to alter cultural attitudes, legislation, and policies that support discrimination and oppression based on gender. Recognizing that gender equality benefits everyone, it aims to be inclusive of transgender and non-binary people as well as all others who face prejudice based on their gender. Feminism is often understood as a movement to eliminate sexism, sexist exploitation, oppression, and to attain complete gender equality in both the legal system and everyday life.

Feminism places a strong emphasis on dispelling myths, educating the public about gender issues, and encouraging empathy and understanding among people with different backgrounds. Feminism is generally perceived as a movement to end.

American critical legal race researcher Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw initially presented the idea of "intersectionality" in her 1989 paper "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," which was published in the University of Chicago Legal Forum. The term is rooted in Black feminist movement.

If feminism is the support of women's rights and gender equality, then intersectional feminism is the study of how girls' intersecting identities, including their color, class, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation, influence how they celebrate injustice and prejudice. The marginalization of women due to factors such as religion, class, gender, and geography gives rise to intersectionality and feminism. Intersectionality acknowledges that various forms of privilege and discrimination frequently cross paths and present particular difficulties for individuals who identify with more than one identity. A woman of color, for example, would encounter challenges that a man or woman of color, who is white, would not.

Using intersectionality as a lens, we can make sure that everyone is included in the struggle for justice and equal rights. Its purpose is not to establish "oppression hierarchies," but to

assist us in distinguishing between justice and equality and in examining the ways in which various types of inequality and oppression feed off one another.

Comprehending the concept of intersectionality is crucial in order to recognize and tackle the distinct challenges encountered by oppressed communities. We may create The focus of the first and second waves of feminism was mostly on the experiences of white, middle-class, cisgender women. However, intersectionality expands this focus to encompass the diverse experiences of women of color, impoverished women, immigrant women, and other groups. In order to set oneself apart from white feminism, intersectional feminism recognizes the diversity of women's identities and experiences. It is not very logical to frame intersectionality as a contained idea, given that it is a work-in-progress. Furthermore, anthropomorphizing the idea as if it were a separate entity with distinct hobbies and duties that reflected its potential and underlying inclination is counterproductive. An alternate method of understanding intersectionality is to evaluate its effects as a springboard for considering what more.

policies and programs that are more inclusive if we acknowledge the ways in which privilege and oppression intertwine. Through activism like this, we can advance equity and establish environments that foster the success of people from a variety of backgrounds.

When discussing the twofold prejudice Black women experience from sexism and racism, Crenshaw used the term intersectionality.

In particular, Crenshaw cited court situations in which women were unable to assert that their discrimination was caused by the combined impacts of race and sex and were instead forced to choose between pursuing a claim of racism or sexism. Crenshaw gave the definition of intersectionality as follows:

"Intersectionality is a etaphor  
for comprehending how  
various forms of disadvantage  
or inequality can occasionally  
compound themselves and  
create barriers that are  
frequently misunderstood by  
conventional ways of thinking"

For example, in this concept, discrimination against black women is understood to be more complex than a straightforward fusion of racism and misogyny. Similar topics are explored by intersectionality and triple oppression, which is the oppression that is connected to being a low-income or immigrant woman of color. The interplay of many social categories takes place within an environment of interconnected power structures and institutions, such as governments, laws, and policies. Understanding power disparities is essential to intersectionality. Relative privilege and disadvantage are manifestations of structural inequality, which arises from the interplay of social categories, power dynamics, and contextual factors. Because of this, each person's experiences with inequality are different and may be either long-lasting or fleeting. Not identity, but rather invisible power interactions and how they create inequality is the main purpose of intersectionality. Intersectionality examines how "interlocking" oppressive structures manifest themselves in the lives of individuals. It is not the purpose of intersectionality to compare various individuals or groups in order to determine who is most marginalized or disadvantaged. Rather, intersectionality seeks to comprehend how many oppressions or disadvantages combine to shape the experiences of diverse people. The conceptual limitations that Crenshaw saw in conversations between feminists and anti-racists in the 1980s gave rise to her body of work. She argued that preconceptions based on both gender and race influence Black women's lives, creating a unique confluence of disadvantage and discrimination. She also contended that social and legal systems that assess sexual and racial discrimination separately are insufficiently equipped to handle or remedy such experiences.

Though Crenshaw used the phrase "intersectionality" first, the idea did not signify a novel way of thinking. The Black feminist literature that came before Crenshaw coined the phrase provides instances of how racism and sexism have harmed Black women. For instance, "A Black Feminist Statement," issued in 1977 by the Black lesbian socialist feminist group Combahee River Collective, is frequently recognized as one of the first examples of intersectionality.

In education, intersectionality is crucial. It can assist us in understanding how the intersection of identities might affect experiences at academic institutions, educational attainment, and access to high-quality education in the classroom. It is possible to create learning environments that are more egalitarian and inclusive by taking into account the intersectional experiences of administrators, teachers, and students from diverse backgrounds. Understanding intersectionality is essential to tackling issues with discrimination, salary disparities, and career advancement in the workplace. Employers can develop inclusive policies, promote diversity, and offer fair

opportunities for career progression by taking into account the overlapping identities of their workforce.

Intersectionality has emerged as the standard conceptual framework in feminist theory to explain the relationship between the oppressive systems that shape our many identities and our social positions within privilege and power hierarchies.

The term "intersectionality" refers to the ways in which many discriminatory factors might intersect and impact an individual's life. Feminism benefits from the addition of intersectionality because it makes the struggle for gender equality more inclusive. By utilizing intersectionality, we can all gain a deeper understanding of one another.

Japanese feminism has developed in a distinctive way, influenced by its historical and cultural background. In Japan, the feminist movement began more gradually during the *Meiji* era (1868- 1912), integrating Western inspirations while navigating a society profoundly founded in Confucian principles. This is in contrast to global trends where feminist movements frequently directly attacked traditional norms. What makes the feminist movement in Japan unique is how it combines the promotion of women's rights with an initial support for traditional roles, resulting in modern manifestations of feminism that speak to both global and Japanese-specific challenges.

Dark moments also occurred during the *Meiji* period, such as the forced conscription of "comfort women," a term used to describe thousands of women and girls, many of whom were of Korean heritage, who were forced into sexual servitude by the Imperial Japanese Army throughout the war. The problem has evolved into a poignant emblem of both the larger feminist movement's resistance to historical injustices and Japan's efforts to make peace with its past.

During the *Edo* and *Meiji* periods, *Onna Daigaku*, also known as Great Learning for Women, was a widely distributed textbook in Japan that taught women how to be wise mothers and decent wives. Women were expected to submit to their husbands and in-laws without question in order to uphold the rigid family structure as the fundamental unit of Japanese society. They were effectively under the authority of their husbands or fathers' families, confined to their homes, and unable to live independent lives. Divorce laws were frequently applied to women who disobeyed, were envious, or were simply chatty.

If a woman was fortunate enough to receive an education during the feudal era, her father or brother would teach her. More than women from lower social classes, women from higher social

classes were discouraged from pursuing education. Compared to males in lower ranks, men in higher classes firmly maintained social rules. Higher class women were therefore more likely to be constrained by social standards.

Children were forced to attend school shortly after the *Meiji* Revolution in an attempt to disseminate the practical knowledge and arts needed to construct society. Forty percent of girls who were eligible did enroll in school for the full four years in 1890. More than 97% of girls who were eligible did attend school for the six years that were permitted in 1910. The purpose of these institutions was to impart feminine modesty.

This history prepared the ground for the feminist movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which demanded greater access to education, political rights, and labor reforms—particularly for the vast majority of Japanese women who worked unpaid in agriculture on family farms or plots. The achievement of Japanese women obtaining the right to vote in 1945 is strongly associated with the transformations in society that followed World War II. The 1947 Constitution laid the foundation for women's suffrage in Japan by emphasizing equality in political, economic, and social interactions.

Prior to World War II, women in Japan were expected to live up to the ideals of "good wives and wise mothers" (*ryosai kenbo*), a tradition heavily influenced by Confucian values. This idea placed emphasis on women's duties as caring, supporting members of the family who promote passivity, obedience, and subservience. Legal structures, like the Meiji Civil Code of 1898, formalized women's subservient roles within the family by designating husbands as head of the household and requiring wives to submit to their authority.

Japan saw profound social transformations following World War II, including legislative amendments meant to promote gender equality. Enacted during the Allied Occupation, the 1947 Constitution incorporated concepts of equality and individual rights, upending conventional gender roles. The legacy of *ryosai kenbo* has endured despite these reforms, impacting cultural expectations of women's duties in the family and frequently impeding their pursuit of employment outside the house. This ideal's effect has changed over time. Diverse viewpoints on women's roles and continuous conversations about gender equality and cultural expectations are present in modern Japan. As such, the legacy of *ryosai kenbo* coexists with contemporary perspectives that acknowledge a greater variety of responsibilities and contributions played by women in the home and in society.

In Japan, there are no laws that forbid sexual harassment. Employers are now required by the Equal Employment Opportunity Law to take action to stop sexual harassment. The Civil Code's tort damages clause would have to be invoked in order to take legal action for the non-compliance with this responsibility, exactly as it had been done before to the Equal Employment Opportunity Law's passage.

## Chapter 2

### Analysis of the story *Memoirs Of A Geisha*

American author Arthur Golde's historical fiction book *Memoirs of a Geisha* was released in 1997. The first-person narrative of the book focuses on a fictional *Geisha* who worked in Kyoto, Japan, from The Great Depression through just after World War II. It's a timeless genre picture of a strong woman making the best out of terrible circumstances, the author shows a new perspective one wouldn't have thought of because of the prejudices. The story starts in the year 1929 with a young nine year old girl Sakamoto Chiyo who lives with her ailing mother, emotionally withdrawn father and her sister Satsu who was six years older to her in a small fishing village named Yoroido.

Her house stood near the cliff where the wind off the ocean was always blowing. Chiyo was very much like her mother as they both had the same peculiar translucent grey eyes. Her mother always used to tell her that she married her father because she had too much water in her personality and he had too much wood in his. People who knew her father understood right away what she was talking about. Water flows from place to place quickly and always finds a crack to spill through. Wood, on the other hand, holds fast to earth. In her father's case this was a good thing, for her father was a fisherman, and a man with wood in his personality is at ease on the sea, he even smelled like the sea after he had bathed. Her father was old as he had already married before to a woman named Natsu had a son named Jinichiro but they both passed away in the nineteenth year of Meiji which was in the year 1886. When Chiyo was seven her mother grew terribly ill which was probably bone cancer. Her only escape from pain was to sleep which she did constantly. By the time Chiyo was nine, the bones in her face had begun to protrude, and she never gained weight afterward. Dr. Miura from their village is the first one to address her father that her mother would die within few weeks while Chiyo was listening on their conversation while making tea for doctor who visited their house to check on his wife. Upon hearing this news Chiyo was in shock and panic because she thought her mother would go on being sick.

On that same day, while she was running in the street to escape her grief, she slipped on the muddy ground as it was raining and the wealthiest man in her village Mr. Ichiro Tanaka helped her get back on her feet. He was examining her face as she hurt her lip and with fascination discovered Chiyo's stunning blue-grey eyes. She started to get closer to him as he was the only one giving her comfort with how tormented she felt during this time period as there were no one to look after and she could only depend on herself. She even started having fantasies of Mr. Tanaka adopting her.



One day she saw father and Mr.Tanaka having a serious conversation at the little table in their house while leaving he sees her and tells her that he was taking about her and said to her come and visit his home with her sister the next day. After striking a deal with Chiyo's father who sold them because he was impoverished and couldn't provide for them seeing selling his daughters into the Geisha district as the only way to secure their future, especially after their mother sickness further strained the family's finances. He saw selling them to a *okiya* as a way to secure their future and provide for their needs as at that time becoming geisha could be seen as a way for a young woman to achieve financial stability and social mobility, even though it meant a strict and demanding lifestyle. He also needed money, which he got from selling his kids, to buy medicine for his sick wife. That whole day she heard her father sniffing, the next day Chiyo bathed herself as she was going away from her little village for the first time. While dropping them off the boat she saw her father with heavier face than usual as he was staring at his daughters and wiped his eyes.

When they arrived at the village Chiyo explains the village Senzuru she arrived at was mainly a dirty, smelly town. Chiyo and her sister was still sitting in the boat and only came out of the boat when Mr.Tanaka addressed them, when they left the boat they met with a woman wearing kimono was striking a conversation with him who she thought was fortune teller and then she examined both of them saying that she was beautiful and Satsu's face also makes them strip to examine their body. Until now Chiyo is thinking Mr.Tanaka wants to adopt them as she also grew close to his daughter Kuniko and she also thought he could look after their father too. Chiyo first got to know about *geisha* when she and Kuniko started following her dad everyday at night, there he goes to a teahouse where *geisha* entertains them. One day while she was at her village, Mr.Sugi came to her who was the assistant of Mr.Tanaka saying that he wants to see them both, down at the village and this will be the last time she will be seeing her father and mother. On the trip to the village she Mr.Tanaka and greets him but she notes that he was strangely cold to them, she is thinking that they're going at his house for adoption but later she got to know that they weren't headed in the direction to his house. They arrived at a train station and were picked upon by Mr.Bekku without Mr.Tanaka saying they were going to Kyoto when inquired about it. When finally arriving then taken them on a rickshaw to their new home. Then arriving there she got separated from her sister as Mr.Bekku only let Chiyo get down from rickshaw told her sister that she was going somewhere else.

Then she met with Hatsumono who at the time was the most renowned *geisha* in the district of Gion. Then a woman struck the flint against the stone, causing a little cluster of sparks to jump onto Hatsumono's back. Then Chiyo explains that a *geisha* are more superstitious than a fisherman

as a *geisha* will never go out for the evening until someone sparked a flint on her back for good luck. Then later she got to know from auntie that the place she's staying at is *okiya* a place where *geisha* live. Then she was instructed how to properly greet the mother who runs the place and her job was to bow as low as she can and don't look them in the eye. It turned out that Mother was actually Auntie's younger sister though they called each other "Mother" and "Auntie," just as everyone else in the *okiya* did. Actually they weren't really sisters but was adopted by Granny. They were then discussing whether to keep her as Granny wanted someone smart and not only pretty. Then mother explained to her that to behave otherwise she will get beaten, advised her to work hard and never leave without permission, do as she's told and don't be too much of trouble.

The following days at the *okiya* a strange place for all she could think was of her confusion and misery but something that startled her the most, after a week or two had passed was she infact survived. Mother had then told her that she could began her training within a few months if she worked hard and behaved herself. As she later learned from Pumpkin that beginning of her taining meant going to a school in another section og Gionto take lessons in things like music, dance, and tea ceremony. All the girls studying to be *geisha* took classes at this same school. She felt sure that she would find Satsu there when she was finally permitted to go; so by the end of the first week, she made up her mind to be as obedient as a cow following along on a rope, in the hopes that the mother would send her to school right away.

Chiyo always straighten up Hastsumono's room when she left *okiya* for dance lessons because she is terrified of her and she's worried what might happen if she sees her alone. Her room is largest room in the place, she later got to know from one of the maids told her that she is the only *geisha* in the *okiya* now, in the past there'd been as three or four, and they'd all slept in that one room. One day later than usual she went upstairs to straighten up Hatsumono's room and unfortunately for her that morning granny had kept her busy until almost noon. While she was straightening her room she meets Hatsumono who insults her and says that she met her sister the other day and asked her to give her the message about where she's living maybe so that they both can run away together, then she told her that she should earn the information from her and told her to get out. Mother then said to Chiyo to never upset Hatsumono again and be on her good side.

After a month after she arrived at *okiya*, Mother told her that time has come to began her schooling. She was accompanied Pumpkin the following mornig to be introduced to the teachers. Afterward, Hastsumonoo would take her as it was a tradition in the *okiya* for a young girl, on the day she begins her training, to observe the most senior geisha in this way. When Pumpkin heard she wopuld be taking me to the school the following morning, she grew very nervous and told they

should leave to the school as soon as they wake up and she had often seen her crying as hadn't taken her lessons well. She'd arrived in the *okiya* nearly six months before Chiyo.

The next day Chiyo woke up early and left with Pumpkin. They both started to talk more as they were rushing, they both were the same age but didn't have time to talk to each other as they were both busy with chores and hardly even have time for meals. Then she got to know about her and the *okiya* is the only place she could live her life as she was stupid and told her that she will not run away, she also dreams about being *geisha* like Hatsumono-san. When they finally arrived at the school and they entered, the classrooms were traditional Japanese style. Then they went to several other classrooms to sign up for Pumpkin's other lessons, she has four classes which were dance, tea ceremony and a form of singing we call *nagauta*. Then pumpkin kneeled in the back of the classroom to assemble her *shamisen*. A movement the teacher entered and her name was Mizumi, she then began calling out names to perform in front of the class then finally it reached Pumpkin. After the class was dismissed Pumpkin then introduced Chiyo to the teachers. All this time in the school she was looking for sister whom she didn't see anywhere.

That afternoon Hatsumono took her to the gion register office. When she entered her whole personality as she turned on her charm changed and Chiyo saw a former sumo wrestler named Awaji, where he complimented Chiyo's seeing her beauty and her eyes which he told looked like mirror. Then he asked her name and place of birth, Chiyo then inquired about her sister but he told her that he didn't hear that name. The next day Auntie warned her to not disturb Hatsumono when she cleaning her room because when a *geisha* wakes up in the morning she is just like any other woman. Her face may be greasy from sleep, and her breath is unpleasant. Hatsumono had already woken up when she entered the room and was putting on her makeup, she showed her makeup to Chiyo also and how she does her makeup. Hatsumono facing the mirror opened a jar of pale yellow cream and used few drops for eyes and lips. Then she tore a small piece of wax from one of the bars and after softening it in her fingertips, rubbed it into the skin of her face, neck and chest. Now she moistened her pigment sticks and used them to rub reddish blush onto her cheeks. Then Mr. bekku who Chiyo later realises he doesn't drag girls but is a dresser, he then helps Hatsumono to get on her large kimono, his job as a dresser was to tie the obi. An obi like one Hatsumono wore is twice as long as a man is tall, and nearly wide as a woman's shoulders. Wrapped around the waist, it covers the area from the breastbone all the way to the navel. After dressing up she knelt and took a tiny lacquer box containing rouge for her lips. She used small brush to paint it on. The fashion at that time was to leave upper lip unpainted, which made the lower lip fuller.

One day while waiting for Hatsumono at night a man entered wearing a traditional loose fitting workman's jacket tied shut at the hip and pair of peasant trousers, though he didn't look at all like a workman or a peasant. His hair was oiled back in a ,modern manner and inquired about Yoko was young maide who rushed to Hatsumono and left a message that Kabuki actor Onoe Shikan had come to town, this was a code to her. As the man who visited is her lover who turned out to be a chef in a nearby noodle restaurant. All the maids knew what she was doing yet no one told this matter to Mother, Auntie or Granny and this was measure of how much power she had over them. A *geisha* shoudn't have a lover and certainly not chef in that. One day Hatsumono and her friend came to bully Chiyo to do calligraphy on Mamehab's kimono. Auntie then adviced Chiyo to be on hert good behaviour because she have to pay back the money until she didn't know the amount by helping us sell, then she told her she couldn't pay her that amount until she becomes a good *geisha* for a long time. After she got her punishment from Auntie, Hastumono finally told her where her sister lived.

She got to know that satsu must be suffering even more than Chiyo was. She coundn't sneek out one of her punishment was confinement in the *okiya* for fifty days. She was permitted attend school as long as Pumpkin was with her. She cant run away because when of the maid had escaped and brought back in the following morning. They beat her so badly over the next few days her wailing was horrible. Even the cook was punishing Chiyo by cutting down her dried fish. Then one day she left to search for sister, then she met her in a discreet manner as the misters shoul'n't know that this is happening. There she Satsu tells her that she's escaping by train and chiyo say she wants to escape with her, then she told she will escape in Tuesday.

By the time Chiyo reached *Okiya* it was already night time, when she entered a room she got scared of a voice and thought it was a rat but the reality was they were Hnatsumono and her boyfriend, he was annoyed that he was caught and argued with her, left the place even though Hnatsumono pleaded him not to leave . Hnatsumono now hates Satsu because she thinks it is because of her that her boyfriend left and she knows that Chiyo wants to leave this place with her sister and she think it's a good idea if Chiyo leave the *Okiya* then it's better for her. Then she give her some money so that it could it help her to leave, Chiyo also knows that Hnatsumono is not doing this because she's kind but she wants to get rid of Chiyo. But what she does later surprise Chiyo as she accuses her of stealing her jewellery but Mother knows Hnasumono brought boyfriend which was against the rules *Okiya* and punishes her because of it. The following day she realised that Hnatsumono isn't the only one angry at her but also Mother, even the maids are also angry at her. Now Chiyo is waiting for the day that she she can escape with her sister, but when the day was coming Chiyo got into trouble that even Auntie who always lenient is also pissed at

her but all Chiyo could think about is that her sister would be waiting for her and she could never show up. The reason she got into trouble is that now they know that Chiyo is going to escape and then the mother told her that she paid for her, she can only leave the place if she can continue being a *Geisha* for ten or fifteen years. Then one day she got a letter from Mr. Tanaka informing her that six weeks after she left her mother had passed away and few weeks after that her father also departed. He also talks to her about how he admires *Geisha* and she being brought up in a safe place, he then says her sister came to Yoshiwara late this past fall but ran away once again with the son of Mr. Sugi. Chiyo is now grief stricken by the fact that she lost all her family members now, Auntie who was the one who read the letter for her says to her never forget them as they are all that's left in her childhood.

### Chapter 3

Intersectionality in the book *Memoirs of a geisha*

In pre-World War II Japan, where geishas' lives are shaped by the intersections of gender, class, beauty standards, and power. The story emphasizes the hardships and tenacity of women navigating a profoundly patriarchal culture via the prism of intersectional feminism, which studies how various social identities produce distinct experiences of oppression.

Gender, class, beauty standards, and power. The story emphasizes the hardships and tenacity of women navigating a profoundly patriarchal culture via the prism of intersectional feminism, which studies how various social identities produce distinct experiences of oppression.

*Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden offers a nuanced portrayal of womanhood in pre-World War II Japan, where geishas' lives are shaped by the intersections of gender, class, beauty standards, and power.

The story emphasizes the hardships and tenacity of women navigating a profoundly patriarchal culture via the prism of intersectional feminism, which studies how various social identities produce distinct experiences of oppression.

The link between gender and class is one of the main ways the novel examines intersectionality. Before she can become an independent geisha, Sayuri, the main character, must work to pay off her debts after being sold into an okiya after being born into poverty

Lower-class girls like Sayuri and Pumpkin have fewer options than wealthier women, demonstrating how economic status affects female oppression. Sayuri's virginity has also been commercialized, which reinforces patriarchal norms by controlling and valuing women's bodies according to male demands.

Beauty standards also play a crucial role in determining a geisha's success. Sayuri's rare blue-gray eyes make her more desirable, granting her opportunities that other geisha, such as Pumpkin, do not receive. This highlights how physical appearance becomes a form of social capital, affecting a woman's ability to gain power in a male-dominated world. Furthermore, the arrival of American soldiers after World War II introduces racial and colonial dynamics, as Western men view geisha through an exoticized lens, adding another layer of oppression.

While *Memoirs of a Geisha* does not present an overt feminist message, it illustrates the intersection of gender, class, and beauty standards in shaping women's experiences. Sayuri's journey reveals both the limitations imposed on women and the ways they navigate oppressive systems, offering a powerful critique of societal expectations.

Additionally, race and colonialism shape the experiences of geisha, particularly after World War II when American soldiers enter Japan. The Western gaze exoticizes geisha, turning them into symbols of entertainment and pleasure rather than skilled artists. This power shift forces many *geisha* to cater to American expectations, further limiting their autonomy.

Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* presents a complex depiction of womanhood in pre-World War II Japan, where gender, class, beauty standards, and power intersect to shape the lives of geisha. Through the lens of intersectional feminism, which examines how different social identities create unique experiences of oppression, the novel highlights the struggles and resilience of women navigating a deeply patriarchal society. While Sayuri's story is one of personal triumph, it also reveals the larger structural inequalities that shape the lives of geisha and women in general.

One of the primary ways the novel explores intersectionality is through the relationship between gender and class. Sayuri, the protagonist, is born into poverty and sold into an *okiya*, where she must work to pay off her debts before she can become an independent geisha. Unlike wealthy women who have more freedom, lower-class girls like Sayuri and Pumpkin have limited choices, illustrating how economic status influences female oppression. Sayuri's life is dictated by men—from the man who sells her, to her patrons who determine her career and financial stability. This economic vulnerability forces Sayuri and other geisha to rely on men for survival, reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies.

The commodification of Sayuri's virginity further highlights how women's bodies are controlled and valued based on male desires. The bidding war over her *mizuage* (the ritualized loss of a geisha's virginity) emphasizes the lack of agency young women have over their own bodies. This practice demonstrates how the geisha system, while celebrated for its artistry, also functions as a deeply exploitative institution where women's worth is often measured in economic terms. Pumpkin, another character who lacks Sayuri's marketability, is pushed further into hardship, showing how the intersection of gender and class determines one's fate.

Beauty standards also play a crucial role in determining a geisha's success. Sayuri's rare blue-gray eyes make her more desirable, granting her opportunities that other geisha, such as Pumpkin, do not receive. This highlights how physical appearance becomes a form of social capital, affecting a woman's ability to gain power in a male-dominated world. Women like Hatsumomo, who are traditionally beautiful but lack Sayuri's unique features, feel threatened by

these standards, leading to jealousy and rivalry. This competition among women demonstrates how patriarchy divides them instead of allowing solidarity.

Additionally, race and colonialism shape the experiences of geisha, particularly after World War II when American soldiers enter Japan. The Western gaze exoticizes geisha, turning them into symbols of entertainment and pleasure rather than skilled artists. This power shift forces many geisha to cater to American expectations, further limiting their autonomy. The novel subtly critiques how Western influence redefines Japanese cultural traditions, showing that oppression is not only gendered but also racialized.

Despite the systemic constraints, some women in the novel exercise forms of power within the geisha world. Mameha, Sayuri's mentor, demonstrates how women can use intelligence and strategy to secure better futures for themselves. Through mentorship, Mameha helps Sayuri navigate the complexities of geisha life, showing how women can support each other despite the competition fostered by the system. This mentorship challenges the patriarchal narrative that women must always compete for male attention.

The relationship between Sayuri and Hatsumomo further illustrates the impact of patriarchy on female relationships. Hatsumomo's cruelty toward Sayuri stems from her own insecurities and limited power. As an aging geisha, she recognizes that her beauty, the foundation of her success, is fading. In a system that does not provide long-term security for women, she lashes out at Sayuri rather than confronting the men who dictate her worth. This toxic rivalry reflects how women in patriarchal systems are often pitted against each other rather than united in resistance.

Sayuri's ultimate goal of finding love and stability with the Chairman raises further questions about female agency. While her love for him appears genuine, it is also shaped by her social conditioning and limited options. Sayuri, like many women in patriarchal societies, equates security with male protection, reinforcing traditional gender roles. Her happy ending, while seemingly fulfilling, does not challenge the broader system of female dependency on men.

The novel also explores the intersection of tradition and modernity in shaping women's roles. As Japan undergoes social and economic transformations, the traditional role of the geisha begins to decline. This shift reflects the broader tension between preserving cultural heritage and



embracing modernization. For geisha like Sayuri, these changes offer both challenges and opportunities, as they must adapt to new societal expectations while maintaining their traditional skills.

While *Memoirs of a Geisha* does not present an overt feminist message, it illustrates the intersection of gender, class, beauty standards, and race in shaping women's experiences. Sayuri's journey reveals both the limitations imposed on women and the ways they navigate oppressive systems, offering a powerful critique of societal expectations. The novel ultimately underscores the resilience of women who, despite being constrained by multiple layers of oppression, find ways to survive and assert agency in a world designed to control them.

In conclusion, *Memoirs of a Geisha* provides a rich exploration of intersectional feminism by demonstrating how various social factors—gender, class, beauty, race, and tradition—interact to shape women's experiences. Sayuri's story is one of survival and adaptation, reflecting both the oppressive structures of her time and the ways women find agency within them. While the novel does not offer an explicit feminist critique, it invites readers to examine the complexities of female oppression and resilience within historical and cultural contexts.

## Conclusion

In *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Arthur Golden presents a compelling narrative that highlights the intersection of gender, class, beauty standards, and race in shaping the lives of women in pre-World War II Japan. Through Sayuri's journey, the novel reveals how these factors combine to create unique experiences of oppression, limiting women's choices while also demonstrating their resilience and adaptability. The geisha system, while celebrated for its artistry and refinement, ultimately functions as a structure that commodifies women, reinforcing patriarchal norms and economic exploitation.

One of the novel's strongest intersectional critiques lies in its portrayal of economic disparities among women. Sayuri's status as a poor girl sold into an *okiya* highlights how class determines one's opportunities, with wealthier women having more agency than those who must work for their survival. This economic vulnerability forces women like Sayuri and Pumpkin into a system where their worth is dictated by men, illustrating how gender and class intersect to restrict female autonomy.

Additionally, beauty standards play a crucial role in shaping a geisha's success, further emphasizing how women's value is often determined by their physical appearance. Sayuri's rare blue-gray eyes grant her advantages that other geisha do not have, illustrating how arbitrary societal beauty norms can dictate a woman's social mobility. This hierarchy of desirability not only reinforces patriarchal control but also creates rivalry among women, as seen in the relationship between Sayuri and Hatsumomo.

The novel also touches on the racial and colonial dimensions of oppression, particularly after World War II, when American soldiers enter Japan. The Western gaze exoticizes geisha, reducing them to objects of entertainment rather than artists and cultural figures. This shift highlights how oppression is not only gendered but also racialized, as Japanese women must cater to Western ideals to survive in a rapidly changing world.

Despite these limitations, the novel also portrays moments of female resilience and agency. Mameha's mentorship of Sayuri demonstrates how women can support and uplift each other within patriarchal systems. Though the geisha world fosters competition among women, Mameha's guidance offers an alternative model of female empowerment through strategic navigation of the system. However, Sayuri's ultimate reliance on the Chairman for security suggests that women's survival is still largely dependent on male protection, reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Ultimately, *Memoirs of a Geisha* does not present an overt feminist message, but it offers a nuanced exploration of the ways in which different forms of oppression intersect in women's lives. The novel highlights both the struggles and the strategies women use to navigate restrictive systems, emphasizing their resilience while also exposing the limitations imposed upon them. Through Sayuri's story, the reader gains insight into how gender, class, race, and beauty standards shape a woman's path, demonstrating the complexities of female oppression and survival.

By examining these themes through an intersectional feminist lens, the novel invites readers to critically reflect on historical and contemporary systems that continue to commodify and constrain women. The challenges faced by Sayuri and other geisha resonate beyond the novel's setting, offering a broader commentary on the ways in which power and privilege operate in society. *Memoirs of a Geisha* ultimately serves as a powerful reminder that while women have always found ways to assert agency, true empowerment comes from dismantling the structures that seek to control them.

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