

Exploring the Connections Between Ethnicity, History, Mythology and Literature

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Edited by

Dipa Chakrabarti, Parul Mishra
and Gunja Patni

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Praise for the Book

Preferring to die rather than remain silent at his trial, Socrates emphatically stated: “An unexamined life is not worth living.” Spanning the vast expanse of space, clime and time, this engaging collection of essays on a theme of perennial significance makes it evident that nothing helps us examine life as literature does. The insightful forays into mythology, fiction, history, culture and folklore are bound to evoke curiosity and eagerness in the readers to look anew at the inherent connection between stories and experiential reality. Kudos to Dr. Dipa, her editorial team and the contributors.

—Dr. Nibir K. Ghosh, UGC Emeritus Professor, Agra College, Agra & former Senior Fulbright Fellow, University of Washington, Seattle, USA (www.re-markings.com)

Exploring the Connections Between Ethnicity, History, Mythology and Literature is a thoughtful and wide-ranging multi-edited and multi-authored collection about ethnicity, history and myth by scholars from India that discusses an array of interesting topics, from the Native American writer Sherman Alexie through Philip Roth’s novel *The Human Stain*; *Bridgerton*, the Netflix series; the character of Sita in versions of the Ramayana; Toru Dutt’s poem, *Sita*; the Indian English fiction of Raja Rao; adaptation of myth in some western and Bollywood films; Indian myths and their cinematic adaptations; myth and contemporary issues in Amitav Ghosh’s novel *Gun Island*; *Pabuji ki gatha*, a popular *lok gatha* of Rajasthan; the transformative trajectory of indentured Indian women; David Malouf’s novel *An Imaginary Life*; identity, memory and belonging in Indian Partition narratives; to Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. The book is a multifold and suggestive study of Indian and global literature and culture.

—Prof. Jonathan Locke Hart, Canadian Poet, Literary Critic and Historian, University of Toronto and University of Harvard

Preface

In the vast expanse of human experience, literature stands as one of the most profound conduits for exploring the complexities of history, ethnicity, and mythology. They not only shape individual identities but also inform collective narratives, offering a deeper understanding of cultures, societies, and the ever-evolving human condition. This anthology, *Exploring the Connections Between Ethnicity, History, Mythology and Literature*, seeks to illuminate the intricate interplay between these elements in literary works spanning different eras, regions, and genres.

The chapters within this volume represent a confluence of diverse voices and perspectives, each delving into the multifaceted ways in which race, identity, mythology, and history are interwoven. Bimilin Jebarcy. N and R.S. Regin Silvest in their chapter endeavour to deal with the struggle faced by the native American people in mainstream American society. From the portrayal of complexities of identity in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, (Cijo Christoher. J & R.S. Regin Silvest) to the portrayal of Period Drama reconceptualized in the 21st century (Maleeha Wasay), the opening sections lay bare the nuances of race and identity in a multicultural world. These explorations reveal how racial constructs can shape personal and societal narratives, reflecting the tensions of living in a postmodern, multicultural society.

As the book progresses, the lens shifts toward myth and its enduring relevance in contemporary times, beginning with Sanskriti Solanki and Parul Mishra's study of Sita from the *Ramayana* and rehemming of the same (Toru Dutt's Sita) through Dipa Chakrabarti's analysis; the discourse continues through Aatika Hussain's examination of the subtle threads of tradition and modernity as interwoven in Raja Rao's literary universe. Myth, as explored in these chapters, emerges as a dynamic force reshaping itself across time, genre, and media from classical literature to modern cinematic adaptations, as seen in Drashti Joshi and Trushali Dodiya's comparative analysis of Western and Bollywood depictions of mythology. Each chapter meticulously demonstrates myths retaining their potency, bridging the ancient with the modern and facilitating a dialogue between tradition and contemporary thoughts. Jheel D. Barad's analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* depicts the blending of myth and reality, questioning the conventional

divisions between truth and imagination, past and present, and the boundaries that separate humanity from the natural world. In addition, Santosh Kanwar Shekhawat's decoding of the folk deity, *Pabuji* dives into the world of folklore adding a new flavour for the readers to gain more insights.

Among other aspects, the book also reflects on the historical and political influences that have shaped literary narratives, with chapters such as Gunja Patni's examination of Indian women's resilience in the indenture system; Geetanjali Multani's profound insights on identity and existence and Geetika Khatri's powerful discourse on memory and belonging in Partition literature. The anthology concludes with Sinyuy Geraldine's discussion of postcoloniality disrupting traditional myths. These narratives underscore how history continues to echo through time, influencing contemporary discussions.

By tracing the connections between history, ethnicity, and mythology in literature, this anthology offers readers a chance to reflect on the broader cultural and historical contexts that shape literary works. The book intends to contribute to the understanding of the texts discussed and encourages to consider how literature mirrors the ongoing conversations. We hope this effort serves as a valuable resource for researchers and readers seeking to explore these rich and often intersecting themes.

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of all those involved in the completion of this academic pursuit. First and foremost, we express our gratitude to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) who supported us by sponsoring the International Conference on "Revisiting History, Ethnicity, and Myth in Literature" held on October 19-20, 2023, organized by Amity School of Languages at Amity University Rajasthan, Jaipur (India). It is precisely a select bunch of the papers presented during this conference that went into the making of the present compilation.

We are grateful to Amity University Rajasthan, Jaipur (India) - our Hon'ble Chancellor, Dr. Aseem Chauhan, and Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Amit Jain, for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this project. Their visionary leadership and commitment to academic excellence have been instrumental in bringing this book to fruition. Our sincere gratitude goes to all the chapter authors who willingly contributed their time and expertise to this book. We are deeply indebted to them for their cooperation and great patience that bore the ultimate fruit in the form of the present book. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to our publisher, Cambridge Scholars Publishing,

UK for their commitment to publishing our book without whom, this book would not have become a reality.

—Editors

Chapter 1

Racial Prejudice and Discrimination in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues*

Bimilin Jebarcy N. & R. S. Regin Silvest

Abstract

Sherman Alexie employs his writing as a platform to bring awareness to his progression and maturity towards the prejudice and discrimination that are faced by the Native American people in society. As a Native American writer, he mainly talks about the struggles faced by the Native American people in mainstream American society. Racial threat is a postmodern threat to the survival of the planet, and it occupies a sizable portion of Alexie's writing. A multicultural society with two or more distinct groups of people is one where issues are very likely to arise. One of them is racial prejudice, also referred to as racism and racial discrimination that Sherman Alexie's novel *Reservation Blues* alludes to. This paper aims to analyse how the novel depicts the impact of racial prejudice on racial discrimination. The article also highlights that racial prejudice can motivate someone to engage in racial discrimination. Racial prejudice can and will produce more racism as a result of racial discrimination. Due to racial prejudice, white people think that Native Americans are powerless, incompetent, and barbaric. Whites utilized the U.S. military as their strongest ally to preserve their colonial control and military repression, and they expected the Native American people to be submissive, loyal and powerless, characterized by a female image, contrary to the white society, comparable to the male image.

Keywords: Community Issues; Discrimination; Racial Prejudice; Reservation; Traditional Culture

America has a long history of racism, bigotry, and discrimination. These practices have deep historical roots and have persisted despite efforts to

address them. They manifest in various forms, such as systemic inequalities, biased attitudes, and unequal treatment based on race. Through his writings, Sherman Alexie demonstrates the injustice that still prevails in America. Because of his Native American heritage and a condition called hydrocephalus, he endured a significant degree of persecution throughout his life. He frequently discusses in his writings racism's dark side because he has experienced it firsthand and talks about the prejudice that is accepted and pervasive both in America's past and present. His interest in writing about racism is fuelled by his own experiences and his observations about it. He questions social norms and promotes equality for all people, regardless of their cultural origin or physical condition, by bringing attention to the pervasiveness of prejudice. Alexie challenges readers to face the unsettling truths about racism that are still present in contemporary American society through the use of his compelling narratives.

White people have long harboured racial prejudice and discrimination against Native Americans because racial animosity and oppression became the main factor. Military genocide, religious integration, and commercial exploitation are the three stages of oppression. It is revealed in his works that the military massacre is still an agonizing memory for Indians, that Caucasian religion has misled Indian youth and served as a timekeeper for Caucasians' violent actions, and that in the present, commercial greed has replaced other forms of exploitation of Native Americans. These three stages of oppression have profoundly impacted the Native American community, leaving lasting scars on their collective memory. Alexie's works shed light on the ongoing struggles faced by Native Americans as they grapple with the traumatic legacy of military genocide, the complexities of religious integration, and the continued exploitation in today's commercial world.

As they viewed Indians as barbarians who hampered the growth of Caucasian development, Euro-Americans engaged in war with them as well as conducted massacres against them. As they advanced west, the colonizers seized Indian land and took its resources. The rulers pursued military conquest when the Indians resisted, and the major battles were Sand Creek and Wounded Knee. Indians are continuously plagued by atrocities as a result of historical occurrences. These historical occurrences have had long-lasting effects on Native American communities, leading to ongoing social and economic disparities. The forced removal from ancestral lands, the loss of cultural practices, and the impact of diseases brought by colonizers continue to shape the challenges faced by Native Americans today.

The slaughter committed by the military is still vividly remembered in Alexie's *Reservation Blues*. Indians have been physically harmed and diminished for centuries, as repentant record industry agent George Wright claims that "He saw their Indian faces. He saw the faces of millions of Indians, beaten, scarred by smallpox and frostbite, split open by bayonets and bullets. He looked at his own white hands and saw the blood stains there" (Alexie 1995: 244). In other words, since then, Native Americans have been plagued by historical atrocities. Sheridan, a current agent for a record company and a former commander who tortured Indians, is quoted by the author as describing his execution of an Indian lady who was pregnant:

I remember once," he said, "when I killed this Indian woman. I don't even know what tribe she was. It was back in '72. I rode up on her and ran my saber right through her heart. I thought that was it. But she jumped up and pulled me off my mount. I couldn't believe it. I was so angry that I threw her to the ground and stomped her to death. It was then I noticed she was pregnant. We couldn't have that. Nits make lice, you know? So, I cut her belly open and pulled that fetus out. Then that baby bit me. Can you believe that (Alexie 1995: 237).

The Indians cannot stop the oppression and slaughter that will inevitably follow because of the power disparity between the two sides. Sheridan declares that the armed forces are the nation's tool for quelling Indian uprisings. Then he accuses the Native Americans of being responsible for the murder. He also holds the Coyote Springs members responsible for the audition's failure. Yet another instance of discrimination based on race makes white people think that Indians are primitive, helpless, and incapable of changing their situation. White people want Native Americans to appear docile and dependent whereas they frequently use the US military as an excuse for their military dictatorship and colonial supremacy.

Due to the Catholic Church's meddling and restrictions on reservations, such individuals are typically barred from becoming familiar with their religion and culture. Before they could make peace with their home religion, customs, and value orientation to restore their whole identity, they would have to go through a great deal of transformation and pain. As they move between the Catholic Church's imposed traditions and their own native beliefs, these characters frequently feel dislocated and confused. After the Indians were vanquished militarily and made helpless, the authorities and churches began integrating them into Jewish-Christian culture. They kidnapped the kids from their parents, put them in Caucasian foster homes or residential schools, forced them to behave and dress in Caucasian ways,

prevented them from speaking different dialects, and compelled these individuals to abandon their own beliefs. The traditional culture of many young Indians was lost to them. The belief that Indians are inferior leads to additional maltreatment of them. This maltreatment includes discrimination in various aspects of life, such as limited access to education, employment opportunities, and basic human rights.

Indian youths are precisely like this: they mock their religion, are swayed by society, and fall prey to fame. The author intends to demonstrate, “how fragmentation affects full-bloods” (James, 2000: 48). The author discusses issues with identity that result from the division between traditional and contemporary Indian culture. Junior Polatkin and Victor Joseph are not big fans of tradition. Thomas, who stands in for the Spokane custom, is frequently made fun of. They never stop drinking and buying alcohol with their reward money and Big Mom is not taken seriously by them. Victor is not the only person who questions Big Mom’s authority. “In fact, many of the Indian men who were drawn to Big Mom doubted her abilities. Indian men have started to believe their own publicity and run around acting like the Indians in movies” (Alexie 1995: 208). Victor Joseph is among the males who believe themselves to be fighters and frequently ignore Big Mom’s advice or rules.

Big Mom’s residence on Wellpinit Mountain illustrates how tradition has been disregarded in *Reservation Blues*. Inferred from the picture above, “Separation from culture, family, and land doesn’t necessarily occur from being off the reservation and not knowing tribal heritage; it can also happen within the boundaries of the reservation” (James, 2000: 48). When they have no other targets, these young people attack their kind. They pursue or draw attention toward white women to demonstrate their dominance, “[They] long for white women as trophies or as a form of revenge against white men” (Grassian, 2005: 102).

The younger generations of India have been destroyed. Victor succumbs to the allure of fame and fortune by selling his inner self to the devil, the origin of all evil, at the price of his closest buddy Junior. He had mishandled the instrument. He is influenced by the guitar, on the other hand. The man is in charge of the lovely tune coming from the guitar. Victor is an exceptional musician and the person with the original, powerful, and true skill. Victor is quite tense when they hold the audition in Cavalry Record’s studio, and his fingers start to fumble with the musical instrument and so, the audition is ruined. Victor becomes increasingly egocentric as a result of his quest for fame and wealth, disregarding the development and well-being of the

reservation. Betty and Veronica, two groupies, make a sacrifice when they agree to a deal with them, "their identities and desire to play their own music" (Jorgensen, 1997: 21). Like Junior Polaktin, who, in selling his soul to the Gentleman, forgets about the advancement and future of the reservation. His career was damaged by his reliance on the magic guitar. A young fighter should be taught to depend on his initiative and have a sincere desire to serve the common good. In this scenario, individualism is incompatible with Indian culture because it is not beneficial to the group as a whole.

Religion has exposed Indian adolescents to white popular culture, values, and prejudice, which propagates the idea that Indians are a dying race. White people have historically seen Indians as a lower race that should be eradicated and heavily exploited. Indians are willing to socialize with white people in *Reservation Blues*, but they face racism, derision, and exploitation. Indians are bullied by reservation police, many of whom are white or have a significant amount of white blood. Michael White Hawk, the nephew of Tribal Council President David Walks Along, was an antagonist to the Native Americans living on the reservation. Despite her attempts to blend in and pass for a white girl, Checkers was abused. It seems that the Native American people no longer have any confidence in their traditions, and they fully embraced white principles.

The church and religion have evolved into a magnificent facade behind which the subjugation of white people continues. Father James, the white priest in the tribe, brings his nieces as they assist the Warm Water sisters in the storage room with the distribution of Communion. When Checkers is knocked down by the nieces, she drops the wine on the floor and on her nicest dress; the nieces then begin to giggle. Chess and Checkers receive a heavy reprimand from Father James and are never allowed to assist Communion again. It is obvious that the white nieces are somewhat harsh and do not treat Indian girls as equals.

It appears that the seemingly good-hearted and civilized whites acted abhorrently. Chess and Checkers visit the train station to see the nieces. They are beautiful and appear to be angels in their immaculate white robes, yet they are contemptuous individuals. Father James tells the girls to give the relative a hug. The nieces escape after causing great pain to someone else by getting on the train and leaving. Father James thinks Checkers' tears are a sign of his unwillingness to accompany the nieces. The decision of who occupies the proper position and whose conduct is out of line rests with Father James, who is in charge. The aforementioned instances demonstrate

that some white people nevertheless don't see Native Americans as having the same rights as other people. They have a selective attitude and seek out aggressive methods. Because the church is not the source of justice in this case, Indians usually have to endure and regret these terrible experiences, despite their good intentions.

White Europeans came up with a new way to take advantage of Indians after taking away all of their land for profit. White bigotry, oppression, and exploitation hinder the Coyote Springs Indian band in the novel *Reservation Blues*. The harsh treatment they got from white people and their unsuccessful Cavalry Records audition serve as evidence of this. New types of racial oppression that have surfaced in the 20th century include commercial exploitation and oppression. Indians are currently exploited by whites, who refuse to give them work or professional possibilities. Mr. Armstrong is the person in charge of the Coyote Springs Indian Band, and he has all the authority. He decides at random not to give the band another chance after they perform poorly during an audition at the recording studio in New York. This is, Mr. Armstrong said, "effectively ends the recording career of Coyote Springs" (Grassian, 2005: 95). When white people hold a disproportionate amount of power in a country, minorities, in this case, Indians, are powerless to control their destiny. People are confined to seclusion on the reservation, where they struggle and feel hopeless. They are quite unlikely to be successful.

Native Americans are exploited whenever white people stand to profit financially, and they are also denied employment opportunities. In *Reservation Blues*, when the two men are thinking about their profit, specifically the financial gain of Cavalry Records, they bring the band for an audition and potential contract. Sheridan and Wright analyze the entire crew and break down each member in the fax they send from Wellpinit, utilizing speculative marketing strategies to pique audience interest. They claim that Chess and Checkers are both appealing to men, but they further denigrate them by saying that they are a little bit like that exotic, animalistic woman. The way that talent scouts view the Indian Other is demonstrated by this dichotomy between the familiar and the animistic. They claim this, "Junior Polatkin is only average on drums but a very good-looking man. Very ethnically handsome. He should bring the teenage girls, which will make up for the looks of Builds-the-Fire and Joseph" (Alexie, 1995: 190). They sum it up by saying that this band is similar to Native Americans in terms of both look and sound, allowing us to dress them in war paint and feathers to make them appear to be Indians. They'll behave in an Indian manner. I think Cavalry Records might greatly profit from this band.

Their idea of battle paint and feathers is egregiously stereotyped, even if their crossover attraction theory is grudgingly justified. This idea demonstrates their hunger for genuine Indians and their exploitation of them in favor of fictional individuals. Stated otherwise, this signifies a new kind of conflict in which the dominant group, white people, is merely focused on their own financial gain at the expense of a less wealthy and weaker ethnic or cultural minority. As stated by the writer, "the cold-blooded manipulation of certain non-Natives continues in a new kind of war in the business world and entertainment industry, both of which are dominated by whites" (Grassian, 2005: 94). Sheridan warns Betty and Veronica, the groupies and wannabes with very little Indian ancestry, when they accept a deal with him, "you do things for us, we can do things for you. It's a partnership. We want you to have everything you ever wanted. That's the business we're in. The dream business. We make dreams come true..." (Alexie, 1995: 272). Coyote Springs, an authentic Indian band, is thus used as a replacement by the pretenders, "By using tanning booths, plastic surgery, and costumes, the company seeks to remodel Betty and Veronica into an 'Indian' band which can be exploited and controlled" (Jorgensen, 1997: 21). Coyote Springs, was taken by Cavalry Records, who subsequently supplied the public imitations or fakes. Jorgensen notes: "In the job market, Indians are exploited and the better opportunities are given to those with the least amount of Indian blood" (Jorgensen 1997: 24). This heinous act also reveals the viciousness of mainstream American culture.

White people have adopted various racial prejudices as a result of exploitation in the marketplace. The album that Betty and Veronica sent to Thomas is full of stereotypical depictions of Native Americans. Cavalry Records try to persuade the general public that Native American tradition only includes Father Sky, Mother Earth, the four directions, tobacco, pipes, sweet grass, eagles, and buffalo with Betty and Veronica's debut song. Sheridan and Wright created simulations and displayed them to the world. This demonstrates how these women seem like a better alternative in Coyote Springs. The cosmetic surgery and tanning parlours, which cause visitors to think that these women are actual Indians, cause huge losses to the Coyote Springs.

Betty and Veronica's song also implies that anyone can utilize the Indian stereotype for their needs at any time. White people who adopt a cultural background are not unfairly prejudiced but are free to engage in any aspects of that culture they find appealing, which "further oppresses a historically underserved ethnic group by taking from them the two main things that they

have left to empower themselves: their identity and culture” (Grassian, 2005: 98).

White mainstream civilization has discovered a new method to subjugate Indians by preventing Coyote Springs from signing a contract, thereby denying them the chance to be financially successful. They recreate historical episodes of usurpation in the twentieth century by adopting and mimicking Indian culture. This latest manner of abuse and mistreatment causes considerable losses for the Indian Band of Coyote Springs. Junior Polatkin kills himself from the top of a water-filled towering structure. Victor Joseph overindulges in alcohol while also selling the Gentleman his soul. Chess, Checkers, and Thomas depart for Spokane. Andrews (2007) says he's perplexed by Alexie's motives, “What is the purpose of evoking coyote's power but then resorting to stereotypically self-destructive Indians who absolve America of its guilt in their symbolic disappearance?” (151). Coyote Springs promotes optimism in reserve as conditions begin to improve. Fortunately, the band's excessive dependence on the supernatural instrument and its inability to resist the Gentleman's drive for supremacy condemn the band to failure.

Alexie's *Reservation Blues* includes all three types of racial oppression. The legacy of militarized rule, which today manifests itself, plagued the Indians. They have been pulled away from their faith, discouraged from pursuing their goals of prosperity, and have been blamed for unethical behaviour. With white people wielding the sword of power, setting the rules, and profiting from the stereotypically racist Indian culture, commercial tyranny has replaced traditional forms of racial oppression. It is sincerely hoped that oppression will end and that all people, whether they are black or white will be able to get along.

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Chapter 2

Facing a Racial Identity Knitted in the Society exhibited in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*

Cijo Christober J. & R. S. Regin Silvest

Abstract

To get social and economic benefits that are typically more readily available to white people, black persons with light complexion may pass for whites. There is also the problem of societal cultural reform to make possible a free, respectable, and prosperous existence. No one's capacity or talent to accomplish the task makes them superior or inferior because of their race. In the novel *The Human Stain*, a passing Jew fights his entire life to avoid the stigma of being a "coloured" man. The protagonist seeks a resolution but ultimately falls victim to his plan. Ironically, the identity he wishes to erase from existence is constantly there in the depths of his heart. In this book, the protagonists view identity alteration as a means of escaping social embarrassment or as a sort of escape that enables them to take advantage of the comforts and benefits of society. Coleman Silk abandons his racial / cultural identity and imitates the whites in the rebuilding of his identity, to end dominance in the name of cultural background, to advocate freedom to live life with honour and not to fall prey to cultural hegemony. For him, identity is a fluid and flexible concept that can be created by individual effort rather than a set concept determined by history and society.

Keywords: Cultural Hegemony; Racism; Social Discrimination

Coleman Silk's tale is narrated in Philip Roth's book *The Human Stain*. As a passing Jew, his inner turmoil, and his yearning for identification has been depicted in post-World War II America, where ethnic origin and race were major determinants of human worth. Coleman Silk is a victim of prejudice, and this is clear from the way he dismisses his ancestry and culture. In the depths of his psyche during his early childhood, the anxiety of being

oppressed and the worry of being dismissed linger because he is a black man. His early memories of the neighbourhood have a lasting impact on his thought process. He was raised in East Orange, New Jersey. One of the best examples of racism is the Silk family in East Orange. They bought the house from a landowner who intended to sell it to a "coloured" family in order to inflict revenge on his next-door neighbour. It is already discriminatory to consider punishing someone based just on their skin tone. In his early years, Coleman Silk witnessed intense hostility in the eyes of the white neighbours who lived close by. This deeply affected him and eventually influenced his choice to pass for Jewish:

Coleman Silk passes as white, to be free. Just what he means by this is always an enigma to his mother. After Coleman's death, his sister Ernestine tells Zucker- man that Coleman possibly wished to avoid being the object of prejudice, as one can assume was the case with his college-educated father, who, once he lost his optician shop, never was able to get a better job than being a waiter on a train (Safer, 2002, p. 213).

When Coleman initially enrolls at Howard College as a young man looking for his place in society, he is struck by racial prejudice for the first time. Being denied food and being given the moniker "nigger" had terrible effects on him. "Refused a hot dog at Woolworth's in downtown Washington, on the way out called a nigger, and, as a result, unable to divorce himself from the feelings as easily as he did in the ring" (Roth, 2000, p. 102). Coleman has a strange sensation about his own identity as a result of how he feels insulted by himself and how he witnesses his father suffering and being humiliated. All of his life's decisions begin to be dictated by his fear of being oppressed and degraded due to his skin tone. His father's remark also feeds his ingrained fear of discovering himself as a social outcast, which eventually results in a form of identity crisis.

No matter how well-intentioned he may be, there is the presumption of intellectual inferiority. Somehow, or other, if not directly by his words then by his facial expression, by his tone of voice, by his impatience, even by the opposite- by his forbearance, by his wonderful display of humaneness, he will always talk to you as though you are dumb, and then if you are not, he will be astonished (Roth, 2000, p. 103).

Coleman is curious about his father's irritability; his father writes about it in such a way that it sounds as though a "nigger" had no choice but to feel inferior while being cognitively superior to a white guy. Coleman is starting his hunt for a non-prejudice-prone identity at this point. Coleman decides to take on a new identity as a Jew despite not being one because of his light

skin. That change in identity caused him everlasting sorrow in his subconscious since race was a significant factor in determining an individual's value in post-World War II America. His identity is always shifting, which pushes him into a type of mental or social void. He cannot retain his black identity or change to become a Jew. His entire existence has become an intolerable pretence of being a Jew.

One of the topics that scholars have studied the most recently, and especially over the past several decades, is the idea of identity. According to the broad definition of identity, identification is just a way of simply identifying who a person is. However, it seems too weak and insufficient to identify and categorize such a psychologically, intellectually, and socially complex being's epistemic consciousness of selfhood. Identity is not only a single concept that can be viewed from a single angle. Thus, rather than defining identity by excluding its linked function with culture, such a definition stabilizes and restricts its extent and merits, leading to the suggestion that, rather than defining identity, it is preferable to think of identity as a cultural biography of a self which is not owned but actively produced and lived "in and with" certain groups of people. As a result, choosing an identity means making decisions from among possibilities that are preset and shared by all community members. Traditions, moral standards, ingrained ideas, and established practices are just a few examples of the societal influences that impact our view of the decisions we make and the self-identity we may create. The same social variables simultaneously form through the people who participate in creating social norms and creating a self-identity inside.

Coleman's identity must be constant, a stable foundation and platform that he seeks out throughout his life. Coleman always yearns for that solid base and self-assurance in his life. When Coleman leaves his home as a young child, he develops the "silky" and "fluidity" characteristics of identity, which may also be seen as a rootless identity. "Throughout *The Human Stain*, Coleman Silk is troubled by these questions about authenticity and voice- the consequences of his decision to pass. His reliance on and discomfort with theatrically and mimicry are at the heart of "The *Human Stain*" (Glaser, 2008, p. 1471). Coleman wants to be free from the burden of his own identity. He struggles with some of it. It's challenging for him not because he hates his ethnicity, but rather because he doesn't want to be hated. He has a dual consciousness as a result of the way his father raised him and his siblings, the ongoing brainwashing of the stereotypical white English worldview, and the repetition of Shakespeare and other works of

literature. He is unable to deal with his community or accept his role as a supporter of white supremacy.

Coleman recognizes the prejudice towards persons of colour and tries to avoid the racist slurs and insults that were pervasive in the neighbourhood where he was raised. His lifelong, impassioned battle has been to dissect and rebuild his identity. Ernestine, Coleman's sister, discusses with Zuckerman the suffering her brother went through as a result of his false identity after Coleman passes away. The absurdity of Coleman's situation is that he has always lived the life he wished to leave behind. He suffers public humiliation as a result of using the racist epithet, his choice of words allows the identity crisis he experiences in his unconscious mind to come to the surface. Coleman is perpetually divided between his transformed identity as a Jew and his black identity in the depths of his heart. The humorous aspect of fate is that he retains "the Black" identity in his subconscious mind for his whole life while wanting to forget it. His personal choice to pose as a Jew to escape embarrassment has the opposite effect on his life. His Jewishness complicates the situation and leads to accusations of bigotry, which ultimately leads to his demise. The absurdity of his situation is that he is charged with disparaging the black race.

The role of superego plays a significant role in forming our identities, according to Freud's theories of the id, ego, and superego. This is due to the superego's role as our ability to think back on our past deeds, judge them, and determine if they were in keeping with society's moral standards, mores, or regulations. All of these moral codes are formed within the framework of social teachings, reflecting societal norms and eventually influencing the formation of a person's self-identity by social standards, as opposed to our inward reflection. In other words, even while people think they have formed their true selves, they are very dependent on external variables since they are so much under the sway of these things. As Beck claims, "—what looks like the outside world becomes the inside of an individual" (Beck et al., 1995, p. 40).

All humans, as interpersonal humans, develop a sense of self through their ties to and membership in social groups, such as their families, friends, the schools and workplaces they attend, the neighbourhoods they live in, the racial and ethnic groups they are associated with, etc. All of which, in this regard, aid and compel people to define who they are in their own and others' perspectives. These connections, which also help to define culture, influence identities by first establishing the culture and then allowing identities to develop as a result of that culture. Undoubtedly, the organization of its

members into structured social connections by a particular culture unites all societies. Identity and culture are intimately connected. Despite being separated from one another in academic studies as social identity and self-identification, they are born under the same circumstances. Self-identity refers to the process of personal growth where any individual recognizes his or her uniqueness by taking into consideration one's own abilities as an object conducting a communication by use of that self, as opposed to social identity, which is typically viewed as an identity type that is formed regarding other people's expectations for an individual, thereby legitimizing the concept of generalized others.

However, racial identity has long been seen as a framework through which people classify others according to their skin tone. This essay also explores the cultural foundations of racial identity in the part that follows using specific examples from *The Human Stain* because this is a topic that is strongly related to social construction. Coleman's ongoing fear of being discovered adds another vivid layer to his inner battle, which he deals with throughout his whole life. His romantic relationship with Steena Palsson, an expatriate from Minnesota who is 18 years old, gives him both joy and pain. He nearly feels intimidated by that 18-year-old woman. When he is cruelly rejected by that girl due to his background, his fear ultimately comes true. She rejects Coleman from her life simply because of his background, despite the best attempts of his family to welcome her. That experience left an enduring impression on him.

Throughout Coleman's whole life, he is plagued by the fear of losing someone he truly values in his life—every interaction and decision he makes in his life after that experience is defined by it. Years later, his marriage to Iris might be seen as a defence mechanism to maintain his Jewish identity. He is sensitive and uncertain about his own identity deep down in his mind. Coleman Silk's hidden inner crises might be seen as being represented by his children's physical attributes and white skin colour. When Coleman decides to abandon his family, his inner conflict comes to a head, as Ernestine, Coleman's sister, reveals to Nathan Zuckerman after Coleman is buried.

Coleman suffered for his decision. Nothing ever escaped Coleman's attention, and that held for his feelings. He could cut himself away from us but not from his feelings. And that was most true where the children were concerned. I think he came to believe that there was something awful about withholding so crucial to what a person is that it was their birthright to know their genealogy (Roth, 2000, p. 320).

Coleman Silk is embarrassed of lying to create a new identity or the social benefits that came with not being black. It is the embarrassment brought on by the worry of being found out. Although lying and hypocritical self-deception are "stains," we might easily argue that Coleman is more guilty of reconstructing and rewriting his history than he is of racism or the exploitation of women in this case. Racism in society affects Coleman Silk. "Passing" can be a personal decision, but in Coleman's case, he doesn't have a choice; instead, he becomes a victim of his environment. He resolves to adopt an alternative identity as a Jew in order to avoid this fate, which is characteristic of most black people. His whole life has been spent in an unending fight to overcome the arbitrary prejudice that a racist society has placed upon him; unfortunately, he has always met with failure. He desires to control his destiny. Yet alas! Every time in his life, his fate breaks him down.

However, it is a cruel irony of fate that Coleman has to live his entire life with the stain and hidden conscience that he wishes to erase. The most important lesson in the book is conveyed by Roth through the character of Faunia. "We leave a strain. We leave a trail, we leave our imprint" (Roth, 2000, p. 242). Whatever the manner of identification, all civilizations appear to have established and simultaneously exercised the concept of identity as a revelation of cultural imposition, embracing individual and social identity, including ethnic, political, and even racial identity. Therefore, collective consciousness serves as a monitoring tool that orders, satisfies, and terrifies the general populace. *The Human Stain* focuses on one's self, class, and ethnic identification to portray the tale of the average man. As the voice of the everyman, Coleman Silk rejects being built to conform to predetermined social expectations, and instead searches for alternative methods to assert his personality. Silk gives up his black roots, including his family, friends, and neighbourhood, in an effort to escape the calamities of societal intolerance. Silk discovers absolutely no freedom after fitting in with a new community, in direct opposition to the future he had planned for himself. His ignored past suddenly reappears in his present like a ghost, reminding him that he cannot escape societal disasters and limitations. To gain his release, he created a new identity.

To portray Coleman Silk as a tragic hero, Roth compares him to King Oedipus. Both are victims of their fate, it is true, but in different ways. Oedipus unconsciously explores his identity; Coleman, on the other hand, is well aware of wanting to stray from it. Oedipus is not an escapist, in contrast to Coleman. Even at the expense of the light of his life, he confronts reality. Coleman struggles to hide the most obvious fact about his life—his

ancestry—as he is tortured by the conflict between two binary identities. Coleman, like Prince, tries to sound like other people, which causes him to lose both his own and other people’s voices. The prayer for Coleman Silk’s soul during the funeral is also the evidence of how post-World War II American culture views racial inequality and racism. “A Jew is dead. Another Jew is dead. As though death were not a consequence of life but a consequence of having been a Jew” (Roth, 2000, p. 314). In the then-post-war America, race and ethnicity are valued more highly, which also had an impact on Coleman’s life. Coleman has battled to be a Jew his entire life.

Another example of passing in *The Human Stain* is the character of Faunia. She does not face racial discrimination, unlike Coleman, but she nevertheless faces the same obstacles when looking for a place to call home. She transforms into a dumb, illiterate caretaker, even though she is not one. She takes on a new identity as part of her continual struggle to escape her brutal stepfather, abusive husband, and the tragic murder of her children. As they battled to keep their identities, Coleman and Faunia both adopted new ones, which ultimately caused their deaths. Coleman Silk, a black guy who poses as a white Jew in Roth’s narrative, is truly black, but no one, not even his wife or kids, is aware of this. However, this racial passing to obtain a “legitimate” identity is not a novel idea; rather, it is a well-known one that has been debated in American media since the middle of the 20th century. This is because of the covert pressure of dominating groups—the dominant position of the white race in this context. Racial passage, according to Gunnar Myrdal, entails a Negro transitioning from the lower caste to the upper caste by becoming a white man.

By denying one’s own culture and ethnic identity, turning one’s back on one’s own identity, and deceiving everyone one meets in the passing, this has come to be understood as a form of self-hatred. Silk keeps up his fight for self-actualization to attain his goals without showing any signs of regret or pain. Therefore, Silk appears to symbolically murder both his parents and any familial connections when he decides to announce that they are dead and shows no evidence of guilt for doing so. This makes the argument that a person’s freedom from a pre-established idea of identity cannot guarantee that they will develop a consistent and comprehensive identity extremely plausible. Although it may be viewed as a test for renewal, it doesn’t necessarily follow that renewal can be totally freed from the characteristics of a former identity that are kept in the background of everyone’s subconscious memories. Paradoxically, to achieve independence, the self is destroyed by ambition and self-hatred, complicating the story’s storyline and illuminating the multifaceted personality of everyman, complete with

anxieties, aspirations, and conflicts. Silk's connections with women from many classes and nations, and consequently from several identities, reveal a lot about his ambitiously obscure search for an identity. One may argue that every personality has hidden aspects moulded by its fears, wants, and fantasies. Therefore, every identity conceals some unwritten tales, thereby producing certain realities that are credible, intact, and visually appealing, while occasionally disclosing some hints of other hidden selves that linger like ghosts and leave a mark on every choice and action:

The human stain, she (Faunia) said (...) we leave a stain, we leave a trail, we leave our imprint. Impurity, cruelty, abuse, error, excrement, semen—there's no other way to be here. Nothing to do with disobedience. Nothing to do with grace or salvation or redemption. It's in everyone. Indwelling. Inherent. Defining. The stain that is there before its mark. Without the sign, it is there. The stain is so intrinsic it doesn't require a mark. The stain that precedes disobedience, that encompasses disobedience and perplexes all explanation and understanding. It's why all the cleansing is a joke. A barbaric joke at that (p. 242).

Without a doubt, every person is born within a certain social system in which self-consciousness develops through collective awareness. However, one may say that a person's identity is always concealed due to societal norms, cultural roles, power dynamics, traumas, memories, wants, and anxieties. Finally, Zuckerman's response to Les when he asks for the title of one of his works at the end of Roth's novel is noteworthy because it illustrates how identity is hidden and constantly being rebuilt for the addresses and addressees: “—What's the name of one of your books? I—The Human Stain! —Yeah? Can I get it? I —It's not out yet. It's not finished yet” (Roth, 2000, p. 356).

This viewpoint suggests that the self may be perceived as a concealed entity similar to a text, turning the self into fiction and inspiring seers to consider other definitions or redefines of it as “the human self as an entity constructed by, and not simply reflected in a culture's social discourses, linguistic structures, and signifying practices” (p. 382). As a result, identity becomes a multifaceted term that can never be unified under a broad idealization of completion due to its hidden and changeable qualities, whether observed or not. When viewed in this way, identity resembles a narrative that can be interpreted and understood in a variety of ways, with constantly changing signified identities that serve as the signifier identities for new signified identities depending on the individual, time, place, and cultural narrative.

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Chapter 3

Bridgerton: Reconceptualizing Period Drama through the 21st Century Perspective

Maleeha Wasay

Abstract

“Bridgerton” one of the most popular Netflix original series, the first of Shondaland and Netflix associations, is an adaptation of Julia Quinn’s best-selling novel series. While the show has clearly struck a chord with its audience, the racially inclusive and modern take on Regency era does not come without debates of historical inaccuracy and alleged superficiality. However, the show does not have a serious tone and is in fact a breezy, quick, binge-able, light-hearted period drama, catering to a diverse 21st century audience. This very fact is mirrored in the casting of the show with black characters playing a prominent part as nobility, middle-classes and extras, alike; in a show set in the London marriage market of 1813. While this might be historically inaccurate, it is the need of the hour and an attempt to reconceptualize and repaint history in fresher and varied colours.

This paper aims at highlighting the elements of reconceptualized history that the season one of Bridgerton aims to present, which becomes important as the show is a part of popular culture and therefore, a means to propagate racially inclusive ideas as a cinematic adaptation. The paper attempts to answer the questions of ethnicity, historical and textual fidelity and accurate representations that surround the show.

Keywords: Cinematic Adaptation; Ethnicity; Period Drama; Racial Representation; Reconceptualizing History

Romances were popularized by Jane Austen in her novels. Her works did not just focus on white characters, they were also a medium for the author to fantasize about her own life. This in turn, made her novels a mode of expression for a white woman. For decades, romances and period dramas have been dominated by white characters, wherein they cater to white audiences and effectively block out coloured people from histories, narratives and the screens of the audience, later in popular media culture. *Bridgerton* aims at amending the white utopia created by the period dramas till date. It does so by reconceptualizing history and presenting a version of British society where people of colour and of various ethnicities are the members of the nobility along with the white members. The show's-coloured casting is a conscious attempt made by the producer Shonda Rhimes and the show's screenwriter Chris Van Dusen to present a racially inclusive, well-represented world, thereby presenting a regency era narrative where characters such as Simon Basset; the Duke of Hastings and Lady Danbury are individuals with the power to lead the society. While, it maybe another attempt at adaptations for some; the coloured lens from which the period drama views the Regency era is a gigantic achievement for others, notably the people of colour who saw the show and found in it an expression of black pride, especially considering that in Regency era, slavery was at its peak. To quote Régé-Jean Page, the actor who played the enigmatic character of Simon Basset, "I generally prefer the term representative to diverse, and I think the cast is representative of the world that I walk through, of the world that exists, it is representative of a world that has been reshaped falsely, the way it has been reported in the past and I think that we're simply doing the very ordinary work of representing that world more accurately and with more generosity than it has been done." (The Knockturnal, 2020) According to Page, Simon is a very good exploration of what our heroic male archetypes are, the character is much like a mirror to what is absolutely terrible about traditional heroic characters, while the character also redeems himself in the most humane way, audiences explore all that has not aged well and needed to be done with, and all layers that needed to be added in such characters; one such layer is that of the character being representative of people of colour. It is necessary however, to list out the arguments of historical inaccuracy made against the show and to flesh out counter arguments and necessary acknowledgements in contrast. The primary argument questions the portrayal of the black characters in the show. In order to completely appreciate the said portrayal, one must look at the cultural context of the show; Julia Quinn is an American novelist and Shonda Rhimes is also American, making *Bridgerton* what can be termed as an American view on