

**THE CULTURE-POWER EQUATION: A READING OF ARUNI KASHYAP'S
*THE HOUSE WITH A THOUSAND STORIES***

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ABSTRACT: A society's identity is ascertained by what is called its culture – customs, rituals, art forms, etc. A society cannot be established without these. But it becomes important to discuss who established these practices and on what basis it was done. It is also mandatory to discuss if all the people in a society benefit from these practices. If a society's culture is established only to benefit a few people, those few must be in a position, where nobody can question them. The circumstances in which a group of people are able to assume a position of power over others, have to be analysed. It would also help to explore how the oppressed people react to the situation. As power transfers from one party to another when situations change, how each party behaves in different situations will also be studied in this paper. To traverse this subject Aruni Kashyap's novel, *The House with a Thousand Stories*, has been chosen.

Keywords: culture, power, society, patriarchy, relationships

Culture determines a society's unique identity. Author and critic, David Oswell quotes from the English cultural critic, Raymond Williams' book *Culture and Society* that in the late 19th century, culture "came to mean 'a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual'. (1958: xvi)" People want to sustain their culture to protect their identity. But who determines the culture of a particular society? Is every party in a community included in determining the culture? Who insists that a particular practice be implemented as culture? Does this implementation have anything to do with power? Are power and culture related? Oswell says in his book *Culture and Society: An Introduction to Cultural Studies*,

... the analysis of the lived cultural experiences of particular groups of people can be conducted with no reference at all to questions of force, domination and exclusion. And yet, to a large extent cultural studies has insisted that power is central to understanding culture.

How then, are culture and power related? What has power got to do with culture? Culture may concern seemingly insignificant and spontaneous activities. But "... the most mundane experiences and forms of expression involve decisions being made, actions taken and outcomes realised (Oswell)."

Every community is comfortable with its general culture. Every community wants to protect its cultural identity. But only a few are able to assert it. These few have the power to control the actions of others. This power may come from money, social status, gender, etc. At home or outside home, the powerful decide the everyday behaviour, practices and relationships of those around them. "Much discussion of these issues in cultural studies has focused on the relation between culture and the dominant social and political institutions that support and reproduce structural inequalities (Oswell)."

In a conservative society, the man takes over the role of implementing culture. The woman behaves according to the rules of culture determined by men. Similarly, a community that has a higher social status tends to decide the behavioural patterns of others in the society. It is in this context that Aruni Kashyap's *The House with a Thousand Stories* has been chosen for study.

The novel revolves around Pablo, a teenager, who has come to Mayong, to attend his aunt's wedding. This is not the first time he is spending time with his extended family. He had come before four years to attend his uncle, Bolen's funeral. Bolen is Pablo's father's first cousin and his best friend. After his death, Pablo becomes friends with Mridul, Bolen's son. Apt to the title, the house has seen and lived with thousand stories. Stories have happened before and are happening at present, because of the people living in the house: Bolen's elderly mother, his widowed wife, Onima, their son Mridul, Bolen's younger brother, Mukut and his family, their unmarried younger sister, Moina, a younger brother, Prasanto, and