

Memory and Trauma: The Japanese Tea Ceremony and Cultural Narratives in *Hyoute no Mono*

Aadya S A

Research Scholar, Department of English, University College, University of Kerala,
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India.

Abstract: The following paper looks at the complicated relationship between memory, trauma, and the Japanese Tea Ceremony as an innovative tool of representation and reception of historical and cultural events, traditions, and collective memories. The present work analyses the ways in which the tea ceremony acts as a material service containing collective cultural memory, transmitting tradition between generations by the most highly ritualised practices and aesthetic principles. The paper goes on to explore the role it has placed in historical trauma: times of war through natural disasters and social upheaval.

This paper attempts to demonstrate how *Hyoute no Mono*, by lacing historical authenticity with creative storytelling, has been able to achieve a nuance in views concerning Japan's Sengoku era through the evaluative narrative structure, character development, and visual aesthetics. The way in which the anime represents the tea ceremony as a cultural artefact and simultaneously as a metaphor for power relations offers a deep insight into the sociopolitical background of that age. This paper will further endeavour to find out how *Hyoute no Mono* helps an audience from across cultures and geographies identify themselves and succeed in providing an idea of what Japanese history and culture stand for. Subtly done with painstaking effort in details and a great effort to maintain a coherent storyline, *Hyoute no Mono* attempts to preserve a historical memory by calling on the viewer of today to consider the relationship between history, culture, and identity.

Index Terms: Memory, Trauma, Tea ceremony, Japanese, History, Narratives.

I. INTRODUCTION

The following paper looks at the complicated relationship between memory, trauma, and the Japanese Tea Ceremony as an innovative tool of representation and reception of historical and cultural events, traditions, and collective memories. The tradition of the tea ceremony is dated back to the 9th century but was not completely configured until the 16th century by the master of tea, Sen no Rikyū. It includes the four main Japanese values—harmony,

respect, purity, and tranquillity. The present work analyses the ways in which the tea ceremony acts as a material service containing collective cultural memory, transmitting tradition between generations by the most highly ritualised practices and aesthetic principles. The paper goes on to explore the role it has placed in historical trauma: times of war through natural disasters and social upheaval.

This paper attempts to demonstrate how *Hyoute no Mono*, by lacing historical authenticity with creative storytelling, has been able to achieve a nuance in views concerning Japan's Sengoku era through the evaluative narrative structure, character development, and visual aesthetics. The way in which the anime represents the tea ceremony as a cultural artefact and simultaneously as a metaphor for power relations offers a deep insight into the sociopolitical background of that age. This paper will further endeavour to find out how *Hyoute no Mono* helps an audience from across cultures and geographies identify themselves and succeed in providing an idea of what Japanese history and culture stand for. Subtly done with painstaking effort in details and a great effort to maintain a coherent storyline, *Hyoute no Mono* attempts to preserve a historical memory by calling on the viewer of today to consider the relationship between history, culture, and identity.

1.1 Short History of Tea Ceremony

The Japanese tea ceremony, or, chanoyu, is a ritualised practice dealing with the preparation and consumption of matcha tea. This ceremonial practice matured into an art form and a system of philosophy deeply rooted in Zen Buddhism and the Japanese aesthetic contemplations; the philosophical bases of chanoyu are discussed in *The Book of Tea* by Okakura Kakuzō, emphasizing its function as a microcosm of Japanese culture and a vehicle for the expression of values like harmony, respect, purity, and tranquillity (Kakuzō 19). To Kakuzō, therefore, tea became more than a beverage: it was an

endeavour of spiritual and aesthetic quest; representative of wabi-sabi—the philosophy of simplicity and nature (Kakuzō 27).

Shozo Sato, in *Tea Ceremony*, goes further into the historical evolution of the chanoyu by outlining the path that originated from the introduction of tea to Japan by the Buddhist monk Eisai in the latter part of the 12th century. Eisai had brought tea seeds from China, along with the practice of tea drinking as a meditative aid, thereby providing the essential precursory conditions for the development of the tea ceremony itself (Sato 12). He also notes historical events and important figures such as Sen no Rikyū, the most influential figure in the history of the tea ceremony, refines and formalizes chanoyu. He establishes the principles of harmony (wa), respect (kei), purity (sei), and tranquillity (jaku). Rikyū's design of the small tea room (chashitsu) and his philosophy on the utensils and setting define the aesthetics of the ceremony. Rikyū's focus on humility, rustic simplicity, and natural beauty played a central role in instilling the aesthetics and ethos of chanoyu (Sato 31).

1.2 Cultural Memory and Tea Ceremony

Cultural memory has simply been defined as the collective memory of a society concerning such shared knowledge, values, traditions, and experiences that are passed down from one generation to another. "It includes the range of practices, symbols, stories, and artefacts repository that re-construct a collective identity and allow historical continuity in a community." It allows societies to have a firm grip on who they are, from where they come, and what values and lessons are worth passing on for generations to come. Cultural memory finds expression and preservation in rituals, ceremonies, and traditions.

In the Japanese tea ceremony (chanoyu), that aspect of cultural memory which pertains to tea in actual parlance is efficaciously preserved and carried forth by ritualised preparations, aesthetic considerations of the tea room, the systems of instrumentation involved in tea drinking, and the subjection to particular philosophical considerations such as wabi-sabi. The history of the tea ceremony dictates that every single action, every single object, and every single setting bear significance beyond their mere contemporary existence but instead reflect a centuries-old cultural memory connecting practitioners to the wider

historical narrative of Japan and the elements that connote Japanese identity.

1.3 Tea Ceremony as a Political Tool in *Hyouge no Mono*

Hyouge no Mono unfolds in tumultuous times, the Sengoku period, characterised by upheaval of political and social changes in Japan. In it, a samurai, Furuta Sasuke, who has an affinity for tea ceremony, works along the changing power dynamics of the time. In blending historical facts with fictional properties, *Hyouge no Mono* narrates both an educating and an entertaining story. The careful description of historical personalities and events allows people to get a deeper understanding of the time while appreciating the creative licenses taken to promote the story. Central to *Hyouge no Mono* is the Japanese tea ceremony, depicted not as a mere ritualistic practice but as a substantial cultural and political instrument. The anime demonstrates how the tea ceremony serves as a vehicle for communication, negotiation, and expression of dominance among the samurai class. With great detail to the aesthetics and philosophy of tea, *Hyouge no Mono* depicts the ceremony's role in shaping social and political relationships throughout the Sengoku period.

Let us analyse some episodes of *Hyouge no Mono* to understand this.

Episode 1: "His Name Is Hyouge Mono"

In the very first episode, the protagonist Furuta Sasuke attends a tea gathering hosted by the warlord Oda Nobunaga. This gathering is not just a casual meeting but a stage where political and personal ambitions unfold. During the tea session, Nobunaga subtly tests Sasuke's knowledge of tea and his loyalty by making comments that can be interpreted in multiple ways, depending on the recipient's understanding. The tension in this scene demonstrates how the tea ceremony serves as a sophisticated means of communication where each gesture, word, and utensil used is laden with meaning. Sasuke's responses—both verbal and non-verbal—convey his eagerness to rise in the social ranks while maintaining a façade of humility, revealing the tea ceremony's role as a conversational tool for political negotiation and self-expression.

Episode 7: "Master of Tea"

In this episode, the power dynamics of the tea ceremony come to the forefront during a meeting

between the warlords Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, with Sasuke acting as an intermediary. Hideyoshi, known for his cunning strategies, uses the tea ceremony as a platform to assert his superiority over Ieyasu by showcasing his collection of exquisite tea utensils and performing the ceremony with great skill and confidence. Each movement and choice of tea ware signifies his dominance and cultural sophistication. The subtle tension between the two is palpable, and the ceremony becomes a battlefield where Hideyoshi's mastery of tea reflects his political power and ambition to unify Japan. The tea ceremony here functions as a non-verbal negotiation where the display of cultural knowledge and the control of the ritual reflect broader power struggles between the two leaders.

Episode 12: "Tea for Victory"

In this episode, the tea ceremony is used as a means to forge alliances and communicate loyalty. Sasuke, who has now gained recognition as a master of tea, hosts a gathering with several influential samurai. During the session, he carefully chooses tea utensils that symbolize unity and trust, thereby sending a message of allegiance to his guests. The selection of specific tea bowls and kettles, each with its own historical significance, acts as a form of diplomatic communication. Sasuke's deliberate use of these artifacts reassures his allies of his support while also subtly maneuvering his own position within the complex political landscape. This scene highlights how the tea ceremony serves as a coded language, where the careful choice of tea ware and the ceremonial sequence convey intricate political messages without the need for direct speech.

Episode 19: "The Way of Tea and War"

The complex relationship between the tea ceremony and power is further explored when the protagonist, Furuta Sasuke, is commissioned to construct a new tea room for Hideyoshi, who has just consolidated his power over Japan. Sasuke's design, inspired by the aesthetic principles of *wabi-sabi* (simplicity and imperfection), contrasts sharply with Hideyoshi's preference for opulence and grandeur. This difference in aesthetic taste becomes a metaphor for the clash between Sasuke's desire for personal expression and Hideyoshi's assertion of political authority. Hideyoshi, perceiving Sasuke's choice as an act of defiance, uses the construction of the tea

room as an opportunity to reinforce his dominance. Here, the tea room itself, as an extension of the ceremony, becomes a medium of negotiation and power assertion. Sasuke's decisions in the design process—such as the placement of tatami mats and choice of wall scrolls—are scrutinized and interpreted by Hideyoshi as a reflection of his own power and status.

II. ANALYSING MEMORY AND HISTORICAL TRAUMA IN *HYOUGE NO MONO*

Recollections, especially as they have vividly surfaced in the life of Furuta Sasuke, continue to be one of the foremost themes in *Hyouge no Mono*. A samurai, who has publicly devoted himself to the tea ceremony, Sasuke consecutively finds his heart caught between feeling the violent demands of his class as a samurai and seeking satisfaction in beauty and tranquillity as an emotion-driven soul. His conscience-drain is exclusively released through continued reflection upon what has happened: serving the warlords—namely, Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi—with brutality and ambitiousness. The scars of each traumatic experience, whether it is witnessing the massacre on the battlefield or fierce consolidation of power, too are captured firmly in Sasuke's psyche, which shapes his motives and creativity.

For instance, after the dramatic death of Nobunaga in Episode 5, Sasuke wrestles with conflicting emotions; while the death of Nobunaga symbolises the end of an epoch, it essentially leaves a traumatic void, which Sasuke strives to fill with his obsession for tea utensils and aesthetic absoluteness. The images of his bloody empire and tragic death send Sasuke into a state of excessive remembering that shows that his devotion to the tea ceremony is far from being simply an escape; rather, it is a form of processing and reconciling with his own traumatic memories. Each tea gathering he either holds or attends is, in some really ritualistic sense, the place where he visits and confronts the pain of the past and attempts to experience that in some ritualised sublimation.

2.1 Collective Memory and the Tea Ceremony

The tea ceremony in *Hyogo no Mono* serves as a medium through which collective memory is preserved, interpreted, and sometimes contested. The various tea utensils used in the anime, such as bowls, ladles, and kettles, are not merely functional objects

but storage places of memory, carrying with them the history of their creation along with the emotional weight of those who have used them. Conversely, for example, when Sasuke inherits a priceless tea bowl that previously belonged to Sen no Rikyu, the great tea master, the bowl is fraught with memories of Rikyu's philosophy, his fall under Hideyoshi, and the subsequent trauma of having to commit forced suicide. In this case, this motif is utilized through objects remembered under the pretext of the tea ceremony, where each gathering becomes almost a reenactment of a bygone era, rife with the traumas and triumphs of those who came before. This is potently reinforced in scenes where characters represent or interpret certain tea wares based on their memories and traumas. Depending on their past individual and collective memory experiences, a tea bowl is interpreted by one samurai as a symbol of peace or the other as a token of betrayal.

2.2 Sadness and the Downfall of Sen no Rikyu

In *Hoge no Mono*, the story of Sen no Rikyu becomes one of the most stirring historical traumas; tragically, such an end greets one of the most significant figures in the narrative revered tea master. The story of Rikyu illustrates the fleeting balance between art and power, which does not escape Hideyoshi's rise and downfall and his eventual seppuku. This injury is collective for the whole tea community; it disturbs everyone and ultimately reshapes the views that one had on the tea ceremony.

The philosophy of wabi-sabi and, even more widely, the minimalist approach to tea himself by Rikyu become the realization of his survival in this brutish surrounding of his time. Ordered by Hideyoshi to die because of their political and ideological differences, this event shatters the rest of the tea culture, leaving a very long echo on Furuta Sasuke and other followers. Rikyu's downfall therefore symbolizes not only the loss of a master but a hero's death; this death will, in due course, cast a shadow upon the tea ceremony's future. After him, in several episodes, the trauma surrounding Rikyu's death will unfold through the memories and actions of those who survive him. Sasuke becomes particularly obsessed with reconciling Rikyu's teachings and the harsh circumstances of the Sengoku period. His own practice of tea, rife with self-doubt and existential questioning, reflects the trauma of watching political might persecute art.

2.3 Memorandum of History and Trauma: Identity Manipulation

The nature of these historical traumas resonates with the characters' ongoing negotiation of identity. With warlords consolidating their powers and eliminating rivals, the samurais like Sasuke were also always pressurised to redefine their role within a constantly changing society. Sasuke's memories of battle, betrayal, and loss loom large in his psyche, propelling him into an identity crisis. His retreat into the world of tea becomes both his response to, and expression of, the trauma he went through. For Sasuke, at each cup of tea, it is through internal negotiations that he intersects his roles and identity with the ritualistic genre. During tea gatherings, for example, moments where Sasuke recalls traumatic events highlight juxtaposed images of serene ritual and violent memory as expressive of tension between personal and collective histories. The negotiations here are both not only internal to Sasuke's psyche but mirror the larger socio-political scene of the Sengoku era, where personal ambition and loyalty are always at an impasse.

III. CONCLUSION

The ultimate message of *Hyouge no Mono* is that the scars of history may never disappear completely but can still be engaged with by art and rituals and thus transformed. One of the stages in beauty is, through artistic expressions, the reception of such characters or actors in engaging their memories. Studying tea art provided a glimmer of hope for the character Furuta Sasuke. "He wishes for the time to stop in the best way and free itself of this trauma of war and death in beauty." Providing the reader with an underlying and historical memory as well as traumatic settings within the tea ceremony *Hyouge no Mono* makes for a profound commentary about the art's ability to foster, mirror, and transform human life. The series does more than commemorate Sengoku-period Japan, yet calls audiences to reflect on their own histories and the ways trauma and memory may shape identities and traditions in the present day.

Hyouge no Mono is an example of the way the tea ceremony can be used to evoke collective memories related to the Sengoku period, getting the viewers absorbed into a world where the narrative of historical incidents is wrapped with intercultural practices. Through visualisation of the tea ceremony as a narrative, helps preserve and diffuse collective memory from that era and enables present-day

readers to connect themselves to Japanese historical and cultural heritage.

REFERENCES

- [1] Blustein, J., et al. (2017). *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies. Memory Studies*, 10(4), 495–509. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698017721793>
- [2] Erll, A. (2016). *Memory in Culture*. Springer.
- [3] Erll, A., & Nünning, A. (2008). *Cultural Memory Studies*. Walter de Gruyter.
- [4] Goto-Jones, C. (2009). *Modern Japan: A Very Short Introduction*. OUP Oxford.
- [5] Goto-Jones, C. S. (2009). *Modern Japan*. Oxford University Press.
- [6] Mashimo, K. (Director), & Bee Train (Illustrator). (2011, April 7). *Hyouge no Mono* [TV series]. hianime.to/hyouge-mono-533.
- [7] Messenger, D. A. (2020). *War and Public Memory: Case Studies in Twentieth-Century Europe*. University Alabama Press.
- [8] Okakura, K. (1912). *The Book of Tea*. The Floating Press.
- [9] Olick, J. K., et al. (2011). *The Collective Memory Reader*. Oxford University Press.
- [10] Sato, S. (2017). *Tea Ceremony: Explore the Unique Japanese Tradition of Sharing Tea*. Tuttle Publishing.