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## MEMORY AND SELF IN *NORWEGIAN WOOD* AND *KAFKA ON THE SHORE*

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### Abstract

“Memories warm you up from the inside. But they also tear you apart”. Mind is a labyrinth. Literature discussing about mind and its complexities helps the reader to explore it. Haruki Murakami’s fictions offer a variety of themes, like love, loss, spirituality, dreams, power of music, redemption, sexual identity, fear etc. This paper focuses on two of his fictions, ‘Norwegian wood’ and ‘Kafka on the Shore’. The paper analyses the use of memory as a tool of literature. The study distinguishes how memory affects the characters differently in both the novels. The paper discusses the notion of ‘self’ and ‘search for the self’. The paper further explores the depiction of existential crisis and anxieties of characters and how memory is used to reintroduce their experience which later resulted in emptiness. The research tries to explore the reorganization of self by accepting the traumatic conditions.

Keywords: Memory, Self, Existential Crisis, Trauma.

Haruki Murakami, the Japanese writer embrace his readers with the world of realities, unrealities, emotions, memories, and dreams. His way of narration and his characters are always close to the readers and make them immerse in it. As a writer, he not only gets under the skin of his characters but also into their psyche and minds. He narrates the story of characters with their weakness, about their past, imperfect self, memory, thoughts and future. This paper focuses on the notions of “memory” and “self” of the protagonists of both the novel – *Norwegian Wood* and *Kafka on the Shore*.

*Norwegian Wood* and *Kafka on the shore* are novels of ‘memory, reality and unreality. *Norwegian wood* travels through the memory of Toru, the protagonist whereas, *Kafka on the Shore* walks through the reality and unreality of Kafka. Both novels explore the complexity of the human mind and the levels of consciousness and

unconsciousness. The novels try to narrate the story of characters who works to construct an identity for themselves. The painful memories and resultant traumatic experiences of the characters help the readers to understand more about trauma and hope for a “brand new world”.

“The best way to think about reality is to get as far away from it as possible” (The Wind-up Bird Chronicle). The novel *Kafka on the Shore* can be described with the above quotation of the same author. The novel is a journey of the boy who names himself after Franz Kafka, in search of a stable identity. The protagonist possesses a split identity, who converses with his alienated self, has a distorted relationship with his father. He experienced a traumatic childhood. He was psychologically abused by his father and abandoned by his mother. He neither has any beautiful memories nor any intimate relationship or

emotional attachment to anything or anyone. This made his identity a shattered one, "an empty self".

To reconstruct his shattered identity, he uses memory and experiences. He also liberates himself from the trauma and unfulfilled desires by creating a new identity. Kafka runs away from home and seeks refuge in Komura Monumental Library. During his time there, Kafka fulfils his yearning for his mother through Miss Saeki. He manipulates his memory with the mystery of an ambiguous period in Miss Saeki's life and 'clings to the conjecture that Saeki is the mother who left him. This substitution helps him to free his haunted past and to create a new identity. Here the memory is used to liberate his painful past of abandonment.

The novel walks into a magical village that represents his inner self. The surroundings and the sounds in the village represent the labyrinth of his unconscious. His journey through the forest depicts negative and traumatic memories. He enters the village and stays there for few days. He identifies and pacifies with his memories and decides to return to the real world. This decision of return defines the successful creation of a new identity and a new self. The novel ends with the reconstruction of Kafka's identity. "...when you wake up, you'll be part of a brand new world.

Norwegian wood discusses an entangled world of reality and fantasy. The novel elaborates the lines of *Norwegian Wood*. Murakami introduces the characters with painful memories of love, death and an empty past. The characters are alienated from reality and lives in a world of unreality and memories. Toru the protagonist lives and tries to get out of the memories of Naoko. Whereas, Naoko lost herself in the memories of Kizuki. Kizuki's death shattered Naoko mentally and could not get out from the labyrinth of memories.

Naoko, who lost herself in the woods of memory and past resulted in suicide. She sought refuge in a sanatorium to detach herself from the painful past. But she was unable to detach herself from it. Toru also undergoes the pain of memories and death. He lives in a state of confusion. "I had no idea what I was doing or what I was going to do". The emptiness of life was clear through all the characters

in the novel. This crisis of existentialism turned them into lifeless bodies and empty selves.

Naoko's death wrecked Toru. But he tries to understand the loss and seeks help without losing himself. Toru struggles with the memories and was ready to face the inevitable repercussions of it. The novel ends by enclosing the painful memories of Toru in the song - Norwegian Wood.

The novels, *Norwegian Wood* and *Kafka on the Shore* explores the notion of memory and its sides of the emptiness of self and reconstruction of identity. Both the novels ask to accept the traumatic experience to reorganize the self.

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