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**A TWO DAY INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL CONFERENCE ON RELIGIOUS
AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN
ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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| | | | |
|-----|--------------|--|-----|
| 42. | IVC-RPPEL_42 | RISING FROM THE DEAD: MYTH AS CULTURAL IDENTITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE IN ARUNI KASHYAP'S "SKYLARK GIRL" Jenniffer. L | 146 |
| 43. | IVC-RPPEL_43 | RUSKIN BOND'S THE CHERRY TREE: AN ECO-CRITICAL STUDY M. Swetha | 151 |
| 44. | IVC-RPPEL_44 | RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES IN BAPSI SIDWA'S "THE CROW EATERS" Ms. A. Dhanvandhiri | 151 |
| 45. | IVC-RPPEL_45 | CLASSICAL LITERATURE Ms. D. Jayasathya | 153 |
| 46. | IVC-RPPEL_46 | RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL ETHICS OF RAMAYANA Ms. A. Mekala | 155 |
| 47. | IVC-RPPEL_47 | THE POLITICAL UNREST OF NAGALAND WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TEMSULA AO'S THESE HILLS CALLED HOME: STORIES FROM A WAR ZONE. Asha K R | 155 |
| 48. | IVC-RPPEL_48 | HUMANISM AND INHUMANISM IN KHUSHWANT SINGH'S WORKS M.Arunachalam | 160 |
| 49. | IVC-RPPEL_49 | JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S DAWN AT PURI: A CRITICISM OF MUNDANE PRACTICES Sonali Mahanta | 163 |
| 50. | IVC-RPPEL_50 | CROSS CULTURE ISSUES IN BHARATHI MUKHERJEE'S THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER Suriyakala G | 163 |
| 51. | IVC-RPPEL_51 | SRI AUROBINDO'S REVELATION OF THE SECRETS TO SILENCE THE MIND OF A SADHAK Sasi Devi. D | 166 |
| 52. | IVC-RPPEL_52 | PERSONAL LEGEND AS A RELIGION IN PAULO COELHO'S <i>THE ALCHEMIST</i> ¹R. Arthi & ²Dr. V. Bhuvaneshwari | 169 |
| 53. | IVC-RPPEL_53 | WHEREWITHAL WITHERS VALUES: A STUDY ON ARAVIND ADIGA'S <i>THE WHITE TIGER</i> . U. Vijayasarathi | 172 |
| 54. | IVC-RPPEL_54 | THEME OF PRAYER IN FRITHJOF SCHOUN'S POETRY:AN ANALYSIS Sabreen Javid | 176 |
| 55. | IVC-RPPEL_55 | FEMINISTIC VIEWS IN ANITA NAIR'S NOVEL MISTRESS ¹V. Aruna & ²Dr.P. Sasi Ratanaker | 181 |

RISING FROM THE DEAD: MYTH AS CULTURAL IDENTITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE IN ARUNI KASHYAP'S "SKYLARK GIRL"

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Abstract

The myths are the symbolic narratives of the ideologies of a community. Aruni Kashyap is an Assamese writer who is proud and responsible for delineating his underrepresented native identity. Assam is a place known for "Skylark Girl" is one of the short stories of his collection *His Father's Disease*. The retelling of Skylark Girl, the popular myth of Assam recapitulates the rebirth of Tejimola in various forms. The age-old tale emphasises the cultural pride of Assam for generations together holding up the wisdom of psychological resilience. The story of the suppressed leaf-girl exhibits the psychological resilience of the innocent girl in spite of the harassment of her stepmother. She remains resolute amidst conflicts and oppression when she was alive and even more determined when she was buried. Her metamorphosis as gourd plant, lime tree, lotus, skylark proves that conventional myths of culture pass substantial virtues mixed with elements of wonder for the successors. The happy life of Tejimola after a long struggle remarks the optimistic spirit and hope to survive beyond human forms. Kashyap in his writing celebrates his cultural ethos staying away for a while from the socio-political turmoil of the soil. Henceforth, the voice of the native soil incorporates the morality of Assamese tradition and the undeniable fact that goodness and justice will prevail forever.

Keywords: *Culture, myth, resilience, identity, skylark, Tejimola*

Aruni Kashyap, a bilingual writer in Assamese and English is a professor of Creative Writing at the University of Georgia. His contributions to the literary world include *The House with a Thousand Stories* (2013), a translation of Indira Goswami's last fiction *The Bronze Sword of Thengphakhri Tehsildar* (2013), an Assamese novel *Noikhon Etia Duroit* (2019), *How to tell a story of an Insurgency* (2020) and *There is no Good Time for Bad News: Poems* (2021). Aruni Kashyap in an interview claims his position as an Assamese writer rather than an Indian writer in English. The rich tradition of his culture back to the fifth-century intellectuals like Sankardar, Aai Padmapriya influenced him to enjoy the native spirit of storytelling. Kashyap has always loved the fable of Tejimola just like the entire community of Assam holding on to the spirit to never give up on life. Writing to him is like an art that reaches perfection by practice. He says, "I am more interested in the absolute wonderful possibilities of human beings, and how interesting they are, and how problematic they are, and how contradictory they are. This is what is interesting to me as a fiction writer" (Chakkar).

Kashyap concentrates on the North-eastern aesthetics and indigenous identity derived from his observation and experiences. He considers Louise Erdrich, the American tribal author as his mentor. To *Tribune* interview, Kashyap says, "My fiction is shaped by Assamese politics, aesthetics and literary traditions — both oral and textual. I use these to write about fundamental aspects of contemporary Indian reality that have been ignored by Indian English fiction for a long time". "Skylark Girl" is the first of the ten short stories of the collection *His Father's*