

## TEMPORAL INTERSECTIONALITY: AGE, MEMORY, AND FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS ACROSS THREE LITERARY TRADITIONS

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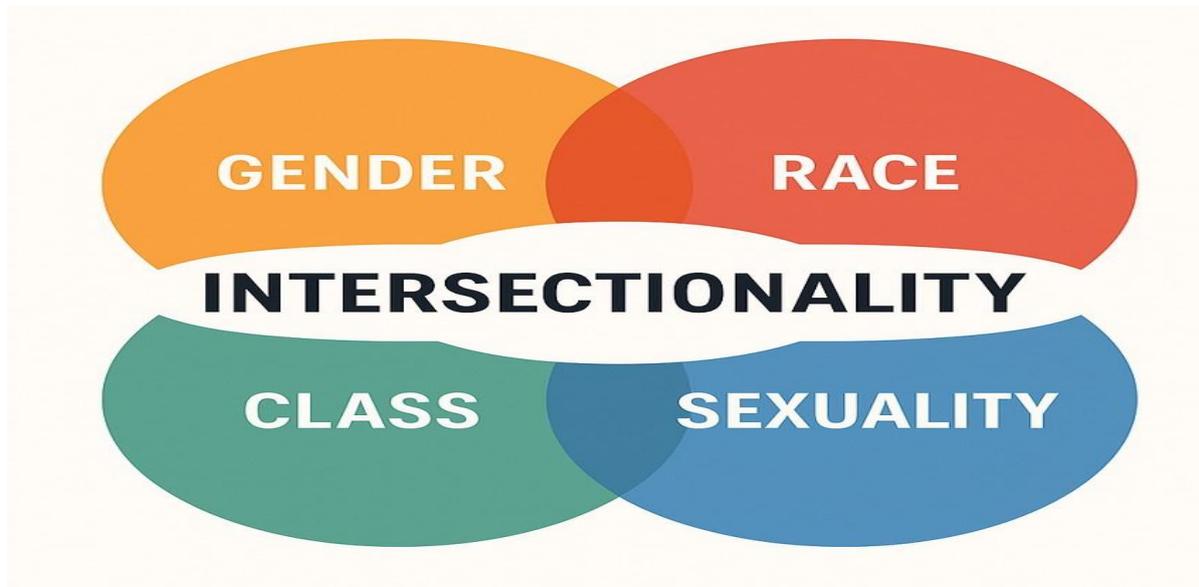
### Abstract

This paper examines the intersections of age, gender, and memory in shaping feminist consciousness across three literary traditions, focusing on the works of Alice Munro, Angela Carter, and C.S. Lakshmi (Ambai). Through a comparative lens, the study analyzes how different life stages influence women's experiences of intersectionality. Munro's older women protagonists demonstrate retrospective awareness, where memory becomes a means of negotiating past gendered constraints and asserting agency in later life. In contrast, Carter's narratives often center on young women whose journeys toward self-discovery and resistance highlight the early formation of intersectional consciousness in the face of patriarchal and cultural structures. Ambai's multi-generational narratives present a layered view, showing how feminist subjectivity evolves across time, with each generation negotiating new forms of vulnerability and strength. By situating these authors side by side, the paper argues that temporal positioning—youth, adulthood, and old age—significantly shapes the modes through which feminist awareness is articulated. The analysis underscores how memory, age, and intergenerational dialogue enrich our understanding of intersectionality as a dynamic, temporal process rather than a static condition. This comparative study contributes to feminist literary criticism by highlighting the temporal dimensions of intersectional experience and by demonstrating how diverse traditions engage with the complexities of gendered lives across time.

**Keywords:** Temporal Intersectionality, Feminist Consciousness, Age and Memory in Literature, Alice Munro, Angela Carter, Ambai (C.S. Lakshmi)

### 1. Introduction

The concept of intersectionality has been central to feminist theory since Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced it in 1989, showing how multiple axes of identity—such as gender, race, class—do not act independently but intersect to produce unique experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw; see “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex”). According to Crenshaw, intersectionality provides a lens “through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects.” (narrative citation) As the Editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* explain, intersectionality is “the interaction and cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination affecting the daily lives of individuals,” particularly women whose identity markers overlap in ways that amplify marginalization (Britannica). Intersectional theory has since expanded beyond race and gender to include sexuality, class, disability—and importantly for this study—age.



Yet despite this expansion, relatively few studies systematically examine temporal intersectionality, or how age and memory interact with gender (and other identity markers) across different life stages to produce evolving feminist consciousness. This paper proposes to fill that gap by comparing the literary works of Alice Munro, Angela Carter, and C.S. Lakshmi (Ambai). Each author, through different traditions and cultural contexts, represents women at different life stages: youth, adulthood, old age; each uses memory, retrospective reflection, intergenerational relations, or temporal shifts to reveal how intersectional vulnerabilities and strengths manifest over time.

This study's objectives are threefold. First, to analyze how aging intersects with gender across all three authors' works; second, to examine Munro's older-women protagonists and their retrospective intersectional awareness; third, to explore Carter's young women coming to intersectional consciousness; and fourth (though integrative), to discuss Ambai's multi-generational narratives as showing evolving, layered intersectional experiences. Implicit in these objectives is also a comparative aim: to see how different life stages reveal varying vulnerabilities and strengths in feminist consciousness when age and memory are foregrounded.

To guide this investigation, the following research questions are posed:

1. How does age influence intersectional awareness in the literature of Munro, Carter, and Ambai?
2. How do memory and intergenerational experiences reshape feminist subjectivity across life stages in these authors' works?
3. What strengths and vulnerabilities appear at different life stages (youth, adulthood, old age), especially as mediated by memory and social identity?

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This study examines how age, memory, and gender intersect in the works of Munro, Carter, and Ambai through three linked strands: feminist intersectionality, memory studies/feminist temporality, and feminist literary criticism on time. Together, these perspectives highlight identity as shaped not only by categories like gender and class but also by life stages, recollection, and generational transmission.

### **Feminist Intersectionality**

Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory shows that women's experiences cannot be explained by single categories such as race or gender alone. Patricia Hill Collins expands this into a "matrix of domination," where oppressions interlock at structural and personal levels. Applied to

literature, intersectionality reveals how gender, class, nationality, culture, and age combine to shape women's subjectivities and their ways of remembering and resisting.

### **Memory and Feminist Temporality**

Marianne Hirsch's *postmemory* explains how later generations inherit traumatic memories, while Paul Ricœur emphasizes memory's interplay with narrative, imagination, and forgetting. Hélène Cixous's call for *écriture féminine* challenges linear, patriarchal time by privileging multiplicity and embodied experience. These frameworks illuminate how women characters' recollections and generational inheritances shape their identities and resistance across time.

### **Temporality in Feminist Criticism**

Feminist critics argue that temporality is central to subjectivity and power. Age stages—youth, adulthood, old age—carry different constraints and possibilities. Nonlinear storytelling, flashbacks, and intergenerational voices disrupt patriarchal notions of progress, creating spaces for marginalized voices. Temporality also involves futurity and ethics: how societies value or silence women at different ages, and how literature contests these temporal hierarchies.

### **3. Alice Munro: Retrospective Intersectionality**

Alice Munro, often called the “Canadian Chekhov,” is widely celebrated for her ability to map the complexities of ordinary women's lives through a distinctive short story form that privileges memory, temporality, and subtle shifts of consciousness. Many of her protagonists are older women who revisit their pasts, reconstructing selfhood through memory and gaining belated awareness of how gender intersects with class, culture, and generational obligation. Munro's fiction demonstrates what can be described as retrospective intersectionality: the recognition, often late in life, of how intersecting forces of identity shaped one's trajectory. As Robert Thacker observes, Munro's characters “locate meaning in the patterns of their lives, discerned only in retrospect” (19). According to Coral Ann Howells, her women “revisit the past in order to reconfigure their identities” (8). In both observations, memory becomes an act of reconstruction rather than passive recall, a theme central to *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982) and *Runaway* (2004). These texts highlight how age enables feminist consciousness by allowing protagonists to look back on choices and constraints once naturalized.

### **Older Women Protagonists**

Munro's fiction frequently challenges the cultural invisibility of aging women. Rather than relegating them to the margins, Munro situates older women as narrative centers whose retrospective authority unsettles cultural hierarchies privileging youth. According to Howells, Munro “gives voice to women at the margins of literary representation, especially older women whose lives have been shaped by cultural scripts yet who reflect critically on those scripts” (12). In *The Moons of Jupiter*, Janet—an established writer in her forties or fifties—narrates from the vantage point of her father's impending death. The story intertwines her role as daughter with her identity as mother and professional, situating her in multiple intersecting categories. Her age matters: she has lived through the constraints of mid-century gender roles, the expansion of women's opportunities, and the strain of balancing ambition with caregiving.

Munro's protagonists are not heroines in the conventional sense; they are ordinary women, often constrained by marriage, class, or social convention. Yet, through retrospection, they acquire a form of narrative authority. This belated awareness reflects what Patricia Hill Collins calls the “matrix of domination,” where intersecting oppressions operate simultaneously at structural and personal levels (Collins 18). Only in later life do Munro's women fully perceive the matrix that shaped them.

### **Memory as Reconstruction of Selfhood**

Munro's fiction is structured around memory rather than linear chronology. In *The Moons of Jupiter*, Janet recalls fragments of her past while waiting in the hospital with her father. The narrative moves between her present awareness of mortality and her earlier experiences as daughter, mother, and lover. This fragmentary style underscores what Paul Ricœur calls the "narrative configuration of memory," where the act of recollection reshapes identity (Ricœur 55).

According to Magdalene Redekop, Munro "illustrates the ways in which memory is never finished but continually rewritten" (112). For Janet, remembering is not neutral: it reconfigures her sense of self. She recognizes how her professional ambitions intersected with her obligations as a mother and daughter, realizing belatedly that her identity was constructed at the crossroads of gender expectations and class positions.

*Runaway* likewise dramatizes the reconstructive power of memory. Carla, trapped in a coercive marriage, reflects on the life paths she might have taken. The narrative emphasizes both her entrapment—economic dependency, cultural silences, patriarchal violence—and her awareness, glimpsed through memory, of other possibilities. Munro shows that memory is double-edged: it preserves the pain of constraint but also the imaginative potential for alternative futures.

Hélène Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine*, a writing of multiplicity and temporality, resonates here: "Woman must write her self: must write about the women and bring women to writing, from where they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (Cixous 880). Munro's women do precisely this through memory: they inscribe themselves belatedly, reconstructing identities denied recognition in youth.

### **Intersectional Awareness at Later Life Stages**

Intersectional awareness in Munro often comes not in youth but in old age or maturity. As Crenshaw reminds us, single-axis frameworks obscure the experiences of women whose identities overlap multiple categories (Crenshaw 140). Munro extends this to temporality: youth may lack the vantage to perceive intersectionality, while maturity provides the distance for recognition.

In *The Moons of Jupiter*, Janet sees how her life was shaped not only by gender roles but also by class (her modest family background), generational expectations (duty to parents), and cultural constraints of mid-twentieth-century Canada. The belated recognition of these intersections exemplifies retrospective intersectionality.

Carla in *Runaway* experiences intersectionality differently. Her gendered subordination intersects with class vulnerability—her lack of independent income ties her to Clark. Though younger than Janet, her retrospective glimpses of possible escape show how memory can foreshadow belated feminist consciousness.

Thacker emphasizes that Munro's characters "find meaning in the tension between ordinariness and revelation" (25). This tension is temporal: the revelation comes only through time's passage, through remembering, through the vantage of age.

### ***The Moons of Jupiter***

In *The Moons of Jupiter*, Janet sits in a hospital as her father faces heart surgery. The narrative blends present observation with recollections of her relationships and career. The juxtaposition of cosmic imagery (the planets of Jupiter) with mundane family dynamics emphasizes the intersection of universality and particularity.

Janet's retrospective insights reveal how her gendered role as daughter intersects with her professional identity. For instance, she recalls the difficulty of balancing writing with motherhood, realizing belatedly how cultural expectations constrained her. This aligns with Collins's argument that intersecting oppressions create "a distinctive standpoint from which to view social life" (Collins 28).

The story's temporal structure—nonlinear, memory-driven—demonstrates that identity is constructed retrospectively. Janet reconstructs her selfhood in dialogue with memory, realizing that feminist consciousness emerges not only from direct confrontation but from belated recognition.

### ***Runaway***

*Runaway* tells the story of Carla, a young woman married to Clark, a controlling and abusive husband. On the surface, the story focuses on entrapment, but its temporal shifts highlight retrospective awareness. Carla remembers moments when she might have escaped, regrets decisions made, and senses belatedly the structural forces—gender, class, economic dependency—that constrained her.

Munro uses memory here as both weight and possibility. Carla is haunted by what she cannot change, but her recollections also gesture toward other futures. The story demonstrates what Hirsch calls “postmemory”—the inheritance of past constraints that shape the present even when not directly chosen (Hirsch 33). Carla's sense of entrapment is shaped not only by her husband but by cultural scripts of female duty and economic precarity.

Intersectionality here is stark: Carla's gender intersects with class (working-class vulnerability), with cultural expectations of marriage, and with geography (the isolation of rural Canada). Only retrospectively does she glimpse these intersections, underscoring Munro's insistence on temporality as essential to feminist awareness.

### **Munro's Contribution to Temporal Intersectionality**

Munro's fiction demonstrates that feminist consciousness is profoundly temporal. Her older women protagonists, such as Janet in *The Moons of Jupiter*, reconstruct their selfhood through memory, achieving retrospective intersectional awareness of gender, class, and cultural roles. Younger women like Carla in *Runaway* foreshadow this awareness through memory's haunting glimpses of possibility.

By centering aging women, Munro resists cultural invisibility and insists on the authority of belated reflection. Her stories show that intersectional awareness is not static but evolving, shaped by memory and temporality. In doing so, Munro contributes to feminist literary criticism by articulating a model of **retrospective intersectionality**, where the passage of time and the act of remembering reveal the layered ways in which women's identities are formed, constrained, and reclaimed.

## **4. Angela Carter: Youthful Feminist Consciousness**

Angela Carter's fiction is often described as revolutionary in its bold reworking of myth, fairy tale, and cultural narratives. Unlike Alice Munro's older women, Carter's protagonists are typically young heroines situated at moments of transition—puberty, sexual initiation, early adulthood—where their encounters with patriarchy, sexuality, and myth catalyze feminist consciousness. Carter's work illuminates intersectionality in the making: it dramatizes how young women, caught in overlapping structures of gender, sexuality, and class, gradually awaken to their oppression and begin to resist.

As Marina Warner observes, Carter “reinvented the fairy tale in order to smash the myths that kept women subordinate” (Warner 19). Through tales of transformation, metamorphosis, and sexual awakening, Carter positions youth as a stage of heightened vulnerability but also of potential resistance. In *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984), Carter presents young female characters who initially inhabit patriarchal myths but gradually reimagine themselves as agents of resistance and transformation.

### **Young Heroines Navigating Patriarchy, Sexuality, and Myth**

Carter's heroines often begin as archetypal figures: the innocent bride, the circus performer, the enchanted maiden. Yet, as Lorna Sage argues, Carter “takes the fairy tale and puts it under pressure, so that the cracks of patriarchy show through” (Sage 6). These heroines' youth is

crucial: they are poised at thresholds, confronting sexuality for the first time, navigating patriarchal power structures, and seeking selfhood.

In “The Bloody Chamber,” the unnamed young bride is married to a wealthy Marquis who embodies patriarchal authority. Initially naive and passive, she discovers the chamber of murdered wives, a metaphor for the silenced women of patriarchal history. Her youth underscores both vulnerability and the potential for awakening: she is initiated into sexual knowledge but also into feminist resistance.

In *Nights at the Circus*, Fevvers, the winged aerialist, is presented as both performer and myth. Though not naive like the bride, Fevvers embodies youthful exuberance and flamboyance, navigating the spectacle of femininity in patriarchal culture. Her struggle is not only against male authority but against the commodification of her own body.

Youth in Carter thus signifies a liminal stage: young heroines confront patriarchal myths head-on, experiencing sexuality and cultural expectations in ways that catalyze intersectional awareness.

### **Intersectionality in the Making**

While Carter’s fiction is not intersectional in the Crenshawian sense of race and gender, it nonetheless dramatizes the emergence of intersectional feminist consciousness. Young heroines face multiple overlapping oppressions:

- **Gendered vulnerability** (sexual coercion, patriarchal marriage).
- **Sexuality** (awakening to desire, recognizing commodification).
- **Class dynamics** (the young bride’s dependence on her wealthy husband; Fevvers’ labor as spectacle).

According to Alison Lee, Carter’s heroines reveal “the artificiality of gender roles by exposing them as performances” (Lee 34). This is intersectionality in the making: the recognition that gender oppression is inseparable from class position, cultural scripts, and myths that naturalize subordination.

The young bride in *The Bloody Chamber* is trapped not simply by marriage but by the intersection of gender and class—her economic dependence on the Marquis underscores her vulnerability. Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus* embodies how gender intersects with labor: her female body becomes her means of survival in the marketplace but also the site of exploitation. Carter dramatizes these intersections at the threshold of youth, when feminist awareness begins to form.

### **Emphasis on Transformation and Resistance**

A hallmark of Carter’s heroines is transformation. Youth is not fixed; it is a stage of metamorphosis, where vulnerability can turn into resistance. In “The Tiger’s Bride,” another tale from *The Bloody Chamber*, the young woman sheds her human skin and embraces her animality, rejecting patriarchal constructions of femininity. Transformation here becomes both literal and symbolic, marking the heroine’s refusal to remain trapped in oppressive roles.

Carter insists that myth can be subverted. As Warner notes, “Carter took old tales and rewrote them, filling them with sexual frankness and rebellious heroines” (Warner 22). Resistance emerges from recognizing the artifice of patriarchal narratives and transforming them into feminist counter-narratives.

Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus* embodies resistance theatrically: she performs femininity with exaggeration, exposing its constructedness. Her laughter becomes a tool of subversion, echoing Cixous’s insistence that women must write—and laugh—themselves into existence. Carter’s emphasis on performance and spectacle reveals that resistance is not only internal but public, a challenge to cultural myths.

### ***The Bloody Chamber***

*The Bloody Chamber* rewrites the Bluebeard fairy tale. The young bride, dazzled by her older husband's wealth, enters his castle and discovers the chamber of murdered wives. At first, she is complicit in her passivity; she is young, economically dependent, and socially vulnerable. As Sage points out, "Carter insists that female curiosity and desire are not sins but survival instincts" (Sage 14).

The heroine's feminist awakening is catalyzed by memory and recognition: she sees herself in the dead wives, realizing that patriarchy has always silenced women. Yet her survival comes not from her own action but from her mother, who arrives and kills the Marquis. This intervention underscores intergenerational feminist solidarity, showing that youthful awakening requires ancestral support.

Here, intersectionality is visible in the intersections of youth, gender, and class. The bride's lack of financial autonomy places her at the mercy of her husband; her gender makes her the target of patriarchal violence; her youth intensifies her vulnerability. The story dramatizes feminist consciousness as belated but transformative, marking the heroine's passage from innocence to awareness.

### ***Nights at the Circus***

If *The Bloody Chamber* explores youthful awakening in gothic terms, *Nights at the Circus* presents it through performance and spectacle. Fevvers, a winged trapeze artist, captivates audiences with her hybrid body—woman and bird, myth and flesh. As she proclaims, "Is she fact or is she fiction?" (Carter 7). This ambivalence becomes central: Fevvers embodies the constructedness of femininity itself.

Fevvers is youthful, audacious, and flamboyant. Yet her body is also commodified; she must perform femininity for economic survival. Carter uses this paradox to expose the intersections of gender, sexuality, and class. According to Elaine Jordan, Fevvers "embodies both the exploitation of women's bodies and their potential to resist through performance" (Jordan 51). Her laughter throughout the novel is crucial. As Cixous wrote, "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her; and she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (Cixous 885). Fevvers' laughter is similarly subversive: it resists objectification, destabilizes patriarchal myths, and asserts feminist joy.

Through Fevvers, Carter emphasizes that youth is not only vulnerable but also powerful, a stage where feminist consciousness can be publicly performed and collectively imagined.

### **Carter's Contribution**

Angela Carter reimagines youth not as passive innocence but as a site of feminist awakening, transformation, and resistance. Her young heroines—whether the bride of *The Bloody Chamber* or Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus*—navigate patriarchy, sexuality, and myth, exposing the intersections of gender, class, and desire.

Carter demonstrates that intersectionality is not only retrospective (as in Munro) but formative: it is in youth that women begin to perceive overlapping oppressions and imagine resistance. Through transformation, laughter, and mythic re-writing, Carter equips her heroines—and readers—with feminist tools for dismantling patriarchal narratives.

By placing Carter alongside Munro and Ambai, we see temporal intersectionality in motion: youth as awakening, adulthood as negotiation, and old age as retrospective critique. Carter's contribution is vital, for she insists that feminist consciousness begins in youth, not as a finished awareness but as a process of becoming.

### **5. Ambai: Multi-Generational Narratives and Evolving Intersectional Experiences**

C.S. Lakshmi, writing under the pen name Ambai, is one of the most prominent voices in contemporary Indian feminist literature. Her short stories, written in Tamil and widely translated into English, offer layered depictions of women across generations—grandmothers, mothers, daughters—whose experiences illuminate the intersections of gender, class, caste,

culture, and age. Unlike Alice Munro's retrospective protagonists or Angela Carter's youthful heroines, Ambai presents feminist consciousness as a multi-generational process, embedded in memory, familial inheritance, and cultural continuity.

As literary critic K. Srilata notes, Ambai's fiction "locates women's lives in webs of family, language, and history, showing how one generation's silences and struggles shape another's possibilities" (Srilata 122). Through stories such as *A Purple Sea* (1992) and *Fish in a Dwindling Lake* (2006), Ambai portrays women negotiating interlocking oppressions while also transmitting resilience and creativity across generations. Her narratives insist that intersectionality is not static but evolving—shaped by time, memory, and cultural inheritance.

### **Multi-Generational Narratives**

Ambai's distinctive contribution lies in her intergenerational storytelling. Characters rarely stand alone; instead, they exist within families, communities, and cultural genealogies. Older women pass down stories, sometimes deliberately, sometimes inadvertently; younger women inherit not only traditions but also struggles, silences, and strategies of resistance.

In *A Purple Sea*, Ambai interweaves stories of women whose experiences range from domestic confinement to political participation. The narrative voice shifts across perspectives, suggesting that no single generation has a monopoly on feminist consciousness. Instead, awareness emerges through dialogue between past and present.

Similarly, *Fish in a Dwindling Lake* centers on women negotiating memory, cultural displacement, and familial ties. As Anannya Dasgupta observes, "Ambai's fiction insists that women's subjectivities are relational and layered across time, refusing the isolation of individual identity" (Dasgupta 201). This layering foregrounds temporal intersectionality: feminist consciousness develops not only within an individual lifespan but across generations of women.

### **Memory and Cultural Inheritance**

Memory functions in Ambai's fiction as both personal and collective. Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory is useful here: memories of older generations are transmitted to younger ones, shaping identity and subjectivity even when not directly experienced (Hirsch 33). Ambai dramatizes this process in culturally specific ways.

For example, in *Veetin Mulaiyil Oru Samayalarai* ("In a Corner of the Kitchen"), memory is tied to domestic spaces. A grandmother's memories of cooking, rituals, and silence are inherited by younger women who reinterpret them. What was once a site of confinement becomes, in later generations, a site of creativity and resistance. Memory here is gendered and spatial: kitchens, homes, and temples encode women's histories, which are then re-narrated by daughters and granddaughters.

Ambai's women also inherit the scars of caste and class. In several stories, working-class or Dalit women appear as figures of labor and resilience, their memories shaping upper-caste protagonists' awareness of privilege and oppression. This intersection of gender with caste and class highlights what Crenshaw calls the inadequacy of "single-axis frameworks" (Crenshaw 140). Ambai extends this insight temporally: memory reveals how caste and class hierarchies persist across generations, structuring women's opportunities and vulnerabilities.

### **Intersectionality Across Generations**

Ambai's fiction exemplifies what can be called evolving intersectionality: the recognition that women's lives are shaped not only by gender but also by caste, class, religion, region, and generation. As Susie Tharu and K. Lalita argue in their landmark *Women Writing in India*, feminist subjectivity in Indian literature often emerges from "the lived contradictions of class, caste, community, and gender" (Tharu and Lalita xxv). Ambai's work embodies this, showing how intersectional oppression changes shape over time.

In *A Purple Sea*, younger women confront urban alienation and professional challenges, while older women recall patriarchal confinement within the family. Both generations are constrained, but in different ways. The younger generation's struggles with mobility, work, and selfhood are connected to but distinct from the older generation's experiences of domestic control. This comparative framing shows how intersectionality is temporal: vulnerabilities evolve, even as some structures remain.

### **Transformation Through Dialogue**

One of Ambai's most powerful strategies is intergenerational dialogue. Younger women challenge, reinterpret, or reject the silences of older ones; older women sometimes resist, sometimes support, sometimes remain ambivalent. This dialogue dramatizes what Paul Ricœur calls the "temporal dialectic of memory and forgetting" (Ricœur 56). Some memories are passed down, others are silenced, but all shape identity.

In *Fish in a Dwindling Lake*, memory becomes ecological as well as familial: the dwindling lake is both a metaphor for environmental loss and for women's disappearing histories. Older women recall rituals tied to the lake; younger women confront its absence. The story stages a conversation across generations, where feminist awareness is not inherited intact but re-created through reinterpretation.

This dialogic structure underscores Ambai's emphasis on relational subjectivity. Unlike Carter's flamboyant individual heroines or Munro's solitary older narrators, Ambai's women are always in conversation—with mothers, daughters, grandmothers, communities. Their feminist consciousness evolves collectively, not individually.

### ***A Purple Sea***

In *A Purple Sea*, Ambai portrays women negotiating love, labor, and community in shifting cultural landscapes. The title itself suggests fluidity: purple as a blending of colors, sea as movement and depth. One of the central stories depicts women in a political protest, interweaving personal memory with collective action.

The narrative shows how younger women inherit the struggles of older activists, while older women see their own experiences reinterpreted by the new generation. Intersectionality appears in the convergence of gender, class, and politics. For instance, a middle-class woman recalls her mother's domestic silences while participating in a labor march led by working-class women. The juxtaposition highlights how generational and class differences intersect in feminist consciousness.

According to Dasgupta, Ambai's *A Purple Sea* "creates a feminist archive of women's lives, where memory and narrative become acts of resistance against erasure" (203). The archive is intergenerational: each woman's memory is partial, but together they form a mosaic of evolving feminist awareness.

### ***Fish in a Dwindling Lake***

*Fish in a Dwindling Lake* dramatizes the ecological and cultural erosion of memory. Women recall the lake as a site of ritual, play, and family gatherings. Younger women, however, confront its present absence, shaped by urbanization and environmental degradation. The intergenerational dialogue reveals how feminist subjectivity is entwined with cultural memory and ecological inheritance.

Here, intersectionality includes not only gender, class, and caste but also ecology. Women's identities are shaped by their relation to land and water, by rituals inherited and lost. The dwindling lake symbolizes both environmental precarity and the fragility of women's historical memory.

Ambai's narrative underscores that feminist consciousness is never static: it shifts with ecological, cultural, and generational change. As Hirsch would argue, the memories of the older

generation—rituals around the lake—become “postmemories” for younger women, shaping their subjectivity even in absence (Hirsch 35).

### **Ambai’s Contribution**

Ambai’s fiction demonstrates that feminist consciousness is a multi-generational and evolving process. By situating women within families, communities, and ecological landscapes, she shows how memory, inheritance, and dialogue shape subjectivity across time. Her stories foreground intersectionality not as a fixed framework but as a dynamic process in which vulnerabilities and strengths change across generations.

Where Munro emphasizes retrospective awareness and Carter dramatizes youthful awakening, Ambai highlights continuity and evolution: feminist consciousness is carried across generations, reshaped by memory, and transmitted through dialogue. In this way, Ambai expands feminist literary criticism to include not only individual subjectivity but collective, intergenerational, and cultural dimensions of temporal intersectionality.

### **6. Comparative Analysis**

The preceding chapters examined Alice Munro, Angela Carter, and C.S. Lakshmi (Ambai) as three writers who, across different literary traditions, foreground women’s experiences of gender, memory, and temporality. When placed in dialogue, their works reveal a spectrum of what may be called temporal intersectionality—the way feminist consciousness emerges differently in youth, adulthood, and old age, always mediated by memory and cultural context. Munro demonstrates retrospective intersectionality, where older women reconstruct selfhood through memory, coming belatedly to awareness of intersecting oppressions. Carter dramatizes formative intersectionality, showing young heroines at the cusp of sexual and cultural initiation, whose encounters with patriarchy catalyze awakening and resistance. Ambai presents evolving intersectionality, situating women’s experiences within multi-generational narratives where feminist subjectivity develops relationally, across time and culture.

By contrasting these temporal positions, we can see how intersectionality itself is dynamic, not static. Gender, class, culture, and memory intersect differently at different life stages, producing vulnerabilities but also distinct strengths.

#### **Retrospective Intersectionality: Munro**

Alice Munro’s older protagonists embody what Coral Ann Howells calls “a re-visionary impulse, where women reconstruct their lives retrospectively to understand the patterns beneath the surface” (Howells 8). In *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982) and *Runaway* (2004), memory is not mere recollection but reconstruction. Through age and distance, women discern how gender roles, class limitations, and familial expectations intersected to shape their lives. According to Robert Thacker, Munro’s fiction consistently “locates meaning in the tension between ordinariness and revelation, discerned only in retrospect” (Thacker 25). For example, Janet in *The Moons of Jupiter* recognizes belatedly how her professional ambitions conflicted with expectations of daughterly caregiving. Carla in *Runaway* glimpses her entrapment only through memory of moments when she might have escaped. These realizations underscore what Crenshaw calls the “simultaneity of oppressions” (Crenshaw 140), but Munro highlights that such awareness often arrives late in life.

Memory in Munro thus functions as what Paul Ricœur terms “the narrative refiguration of time” (Ricœur 55). Women re-narrate themselves, seeing how their identities were shaped by intersections of gender, class, and generational duty. Retrospective intersectionality emphasizes the belatedness of feminist consciousness: only through age and memory can women reconfigure their pasts.

#### **Formative Intersectionality: Carter**

Angela Carter, by contrast, focuses on youth as a site of awakening. As Lorna Sage observes, Carter “puts the fairy tale under pressure so that the cracks of patriarchy show through” (Sage

6). Young heroines in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984) embody both vulnerability and transformation.

In “The Bloody Chamber,” the young bride discovers the chamber of murdered wives. Initially complicit in passivity, she awakens to feminist consciousness when she recognizes herself as the next victim. Her survival depends on her mother’s intervention, highlighting what Alison Lee calls Carter’s “emphasis on female solidarity against patriarchal narratives” (Lee 34). The story dramatizes intersectionality in the making: youth, gender, and class converge in the bride’s vulnerability, as her economic dependence amplifies patriarchal control.

In *Nights at the Circus*, Fevvers embodies performance as resistance. Her flamboyant youthfulness exposes the constructedness of femininity. According to Elaine Jordan, Fevvers “represents both the exploitation of women’s bodies and their power to subvert through performance” (Jordan 51). Youth here is not only vulnerable but creative, capable of transforming myth into resistance.

Carter’s heroines exemplify formative intersectionality: feminist consciousness emerges at the threshold of life, when young women encounter overlapping oppressions and begin to resist. Transformation—whether through metamorphosis, performance, or laughter—marks youth as a stage of becoming.

### **Evolving Intersectionality: Ambai**

Ambai situates intersectionality within intergenerational continuity. As K. Srilata remarks, Ambai’s fiction “traces women’s lives in webs of kinship, language, and memory, where each generation inherits both silence and resistance” (Srilata 122). In *A Purple Sea* (1992) and *Fish in a Dwindling Lake* (2006), feminist consciousness emerges relationally, shaped by dialogue between mothers, daughters, and grandmothers.

In *A Purple Sea*, women’s experiences of domestic confinement and political participation are juxtaposed, showing how younger women reinterpret older women’s silences. Intersectionality here includes not only gender and class but also political and communal identities. As Anannya Dasgupta notes, Ambai’s fiction “creates a feminist archive, where memories of the past animate contemporary struggles” (Dasgupta 203).

*Fish in a Dwindling Lake* ties women’s identities to ecological and cultural memory. Older women recall rituals around the lake; younger women confront its absence due to environmental degradation. Intersectionality here extends to ecology: gender, class, and environment intersect in shaping identity. According to Ricœur, memory always involves “the dialectic of remembering and forgetting” (56). Ambai dramatizes this across generations, showing how some memories survive and others fade, shaping feminist subjectivity differently for each generation.

Ambai’s evolving intersectionality emphasizes continuity and transformation: feminist awareness is never complete but transmitted, reinterpreted, and reshaped across generations.

### **Temporal Positioning: Youth, Adulthood, Old Age**

When Munro, Carter, and Ambai are read together, the significance of temporal positioning becomes clear. Youth (Carter) is a stage of awakening, marked by vulnerability but also transformation. Adulthood (Ambai) is a stage of negotiation and continuity, where feminist consciousness evolves relationally across generations. Old age (Munro) is a stage of retrospection, where memory reconstructs selfhood and belated awareness emerges.

This tripartite temporal model highlights what Julia Kristeva calls the “women’s time” of feminist subjectivity: cyclical, monumental, and generational (Kristeva 17). Feminist consciousness is not linear but temporal, shaped by memory, inheritance, and age. Each stage offers different vantage points on intersectionality: youth reveals its formation, adulthood its evolution, and old age its retrospective critique.

### **Intersections of Gender, Culture, Class, and Memory**

Across all three authors, gender intersects with other categories differently depending on temporal positioning.

- **Gender and Class:** In Munro, economic dependency is revealed retrospectively (Carla in *Runaway*). In Carter, class amplifies youthful vulnerability (the bride's dependence in *The Bloody Chamber*). In Ambai, class and caste shape generational differences, as working-class women influence middle-class protagonists.
- **Gender and Culture:** Carter rewrites European myths and fairy tales, exposing cultural scripts of femininity. Munro situates women in Canadian cultural contexts, where generational duty intersects with gender roles. Ambai highlights Indian cultural frameworks, where religion, caste, and language shape women's identities.
- **Gender and Memory:** Munro emphasizes memory as reconstruction in old age. Carter uses memory as revelation in youth, as heroines recognize silenced pasts. Ambai situates memory as inheritance, shaping feminist subjectivity across generations.

Together, these intersections demonstrate that feminist consciousness is always temporal: mediated by age, culture, class, and memory.

The comparative analysis of Munro, Carter, and Ambai demonstrates that intersectionality must be theorized temporally. Munro reveals retrospective intersectionality, Carter dramatizes formative intersectionality, and Ambai presents evolving intersectionality. By situating feminist consciousness in youth, adulthood, and old age, these writers show that intersectional awareness is dynamic, shaped by memory, culture, and generational dialogue.

As Crenshaw reminds us, intersectionality is about "mapping the margins" of identity (Crenshaw 140). Reading Munro, Carter, and Ambai together maps those margins across time, revealing how feminist consciousness is not fixed but continually reconstructed. This temporal framework enriches feminist literary criticism by highlighting that intersectionality must account not only for categories of identity but for the life stages and memories through which those categories are experienced and reinterpreted.

## 7. Discussion

The comparative analysis of Alice Munro, Angela Carter, and C.S. Lakshmi (Ambai) demonstrates that intersectionality cannot be understood solely through the static categories of gender, race, class, or sexuality. Instead, it must also be theorized in terms of temporality—how identity is lived across time, shaped by memory, intergenerational inheritance, and life stages such as youth, adulthood, and old age. This section explores four key insights: age as a crucial axis of intersectionality; memory as a bridge across temporal identities; intergenerational feminist consciousness; and the reframing of intersectionality as dynamic, temporal, and evolving.

### Age as a Crucial Axis of Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced intersectionality to show how women of color's experiences were shaped by overlapping systems of race and gender discrimination (Crenshaw 140). While Crenshaw's framework emphasized race and gender, later theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins expanded the concept to include class, sexuality, and other markers of identity, conceptualizing a "matrix of domination" that structures oppression and privilege (Collins 18). Yet age has often been overlooked as a structural category.

Age is not simply biological but socially constructed, mediated by cultural expectations and norms. As Margaret Gullette has argued, Western culture often "narrates decline into old age" (Gullette 12), rendering older women invisible. By contrast, youth is fetishized as beauty, vitality, and possibility. Munro, Carter, and Ambai demonstrate how these cultural scripts shape women's lives and their feminist consciousness differently.

According to Coral Ann Howells, Munro "gives voice to older women at the margins of cultural representation, whose retrospective reflections rewrite the terms of their identity"

(Howells 9). In *The Moons of Jupiter*, Janet's reflections on her past as a mother and daughter demonstrate how feminist awareness emerges belatedly, when age allows her to see patterns that were invisible in youth. Carter, by contrast, emphasizes the intensity of youthful initiation, as in *The Bloody Chamber*, where the young bride confronts patriarchy directly through sexuality and class dependence. Ambai, finally, positions adulthood as a site of intergenerational negotiation, where women inherit both silence and resilience from their mothers and grandmothers.

Thus, age itself functions as an axis of intersectionality: it shapes how gender, class, and culture are lived, whether through youthful vulnerability, adult negotiation, or retrospective critique.

### **Memory as a Bridge Across Temporal Identities**

If age situates women at different life stages, memory connects these stages across time. As Paul Ricœur insists, "to remember is not to retrieve but to refigure" (55). Memory reconstructs identity by reinterpreting past experiences through present awareness. For women in Munro, Carter, and Ambai, memory is a bridge between temporal identities: it allows the young to glimpse possible futures, the old to reinterpret their pasts, and the adult to connect across generations.

Munro exemplifies this dynamic in *Runaway*, where Carla's retrospective recollections highlight her entrapment within gendered and economic structures. Her memories illuminate what was invisible in the immediacy of youth: that her lack of financial independence intersected with gendered subordination to create vulnerability (Munro 45). According to Magdalene Redekop, Munro's stories show how "memory is never finished but continually rewritten" (112). This reconstructive memory becomes the ground for retrospective intersectionality.

Carter also relies on memory, but in the formative mode. In *The Bloody Chamber*, the young bride remembers her mother's warnings, and those inherited memories save her life when the mother intervenes. Here, memory is anticipatory: it links the past (her mother's generation) with the present crisis, and creates a feminist continuity across youth and age.

Ambai's fiction dramatizes memory most explicitly as collective inheritance. In *Fish in a Dwindling Lake*, younger women inherit older women's memories of rituals around the lake, even when the lake itself has disappeared. This exemplifies Hirsch's concept of **postmemory**, in which younger generations are shaped by memories they did not directly experience (Hirsch 33). Memory bridges temporal identities, creating feminist awareness that transcends the individual lifespan.

### **Intergenerational Feminist Consciousness**

Ambai especially foregrounds intergenerational feminist consciousness, but Munro and Carter also stage moments of continuity between generations. Intergenerational dialogue disrupts the linear narrative of feminist awakening as belonging to a single individual. Instead, feminist subjectivity emerges through conversation between older and younger women.

According to Julia Kristeva, women's time must be understood not only as linear but also as cyclical and monumental, encompassing generational and historical rhythms (Kristeva 17). Ambai's *A Purple Sea* embodies this temporality by juxtaposing stories of mothers and daughters, domestic labor and political protest, silence and resistance. Feminist consciousness evolves relationally, as each generation reinterprets the struggles of the previous one.

Munro, too, emphasizes intergenerational dialogue. In *The Moons of Jupiter*, Janet's reflections are structured by her father's illness and her role as mother to her daughters. She is situated between generations, negotiating care for both parent and child. Retrospective intersectionality thus becomes intergenerational: awareness emerges not only from memory but from occupying multiple generational positions simultaneously.

Carter dramatizes intergenerational consciousness in more mythic form. In *The Bloody Chamber*, the young bride is saved by her mother, whose strength disrupts the patriarchal narrative of passive femininity. Here, feminist consciousness is not individual but shared across generations, as maternal power enables youthful survival.

Thus, intergenerational feminist consciousness emerges as a recurring theme across all three authors. Feminist awareness is transmitted, reshaped, and amplified through generational continuity.

### **Reframing Intersectionality as Dynamic, Temporal, and Evolving**

The most significant contribution of reading Munro, Carter, and Ambai together is the reframing of intersectionality itself. Intersectionality is often treated as a static framework, mapping how categories such as race, gender, and class intersect at a single moment. But these texts show that intersectionality is temporal: it evolves across life stages, is mediated by memory, and is transmitted across generations.

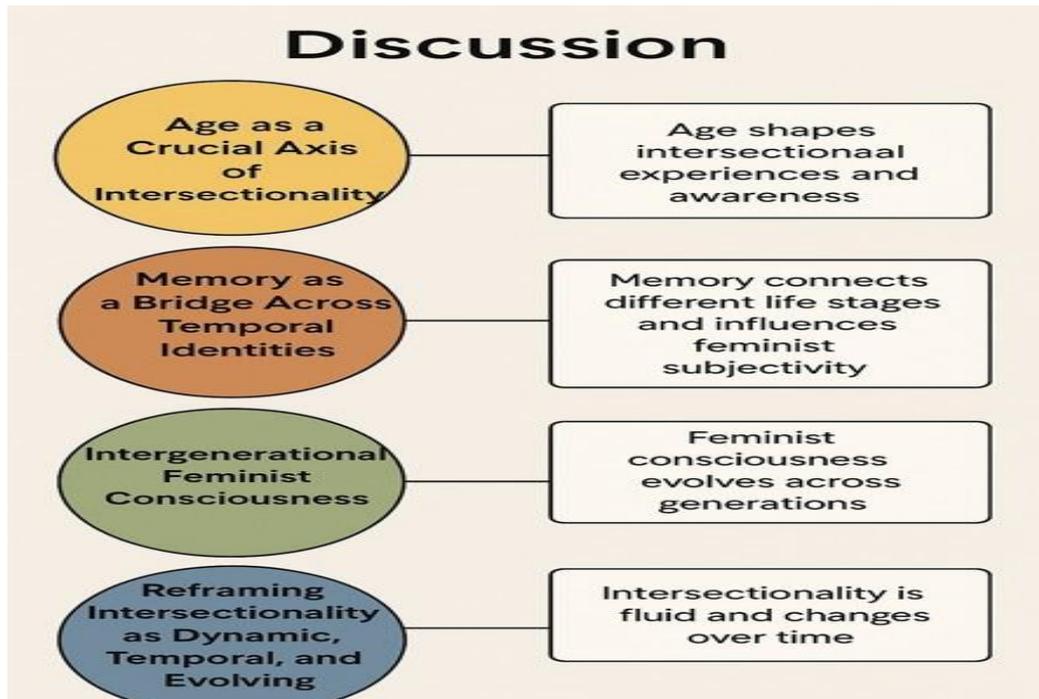
Munro's retrospective intersectionality shows how older women reconstruct their pasts to discern patterns of oppression and agency. Carter's formative intersectionality demonstrates how young women, at thresholds of sexuality and cultural initiation, first encounter intersecting oppressions. Ambai's evolving intersectionality highlights how feminist consciousness is layered across generations, communities, and cultural inheritances.

According to Rita Felski, "feminist criticism must resist static categories and instead pay attention to the processes of becoming, the ways subjectivity unfolds across time" (Felski 45). Munro, Carter, and Ambai exemplify this approach: their works insist that feminist subjectivity is always in process, shaped by temporal positioning.

This reframing has critical implications. It suggests that intersectionality must be understood not only spatially (how categories overlap) but temporally (how categories are lived across time). Feminist consciousness is not a fixed point but a dynamic, evolving process: awakening in youth, negotiating in adulthood, reflecting in old age, and transmitted across generations.

The discussion underscores that intersectionality is fundamentally temporal. Age functions as a crucial axis, shaping how gender, class, and culture intersect at different life stages. Memory bridges temporal identities, allowing women to reinterpret their pasts and imagine alternative futures. Intergenerational feminist consciousness highlights that feminist awareness is relational, transmitted across generations. Taken together, these insights reframe intersectionality as dynamic, temporal, and evolving.

Munro, Carter, and Ambai thus expand feminist literary criticism by situating women's subjectivities within the flow of time. Their works demonstrate that feminist consciousness cannot be understood apart from temporality, memory, and intergenerational dialogue. Intersectionality, in this view, is not a static map but a living process—one that shifts, adapts, and transforms as women move through youth, adulthood, and old age, remembering the past and imagining the future.



## 8. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how age, memory, and feminist consciousness intersect across the works of Alice Munro, Angela Carter, and C.S. Lakshmi (Ambai). Beginning with Kimberlé Crenshaw's definition of intersectionality as the overlapping of race, gender, and class in shaping women's lives (Crenshaw 140), the paper extended the concept by foregrounding temporality as an often-overlooked dimension. By analyzing Munro's retrospective narratives, Carter's youthful heroines, and Ambai's multi-generational storytelling, the study developed the framework of temporal intersectionality.

The comparative readings have shown that intersectional awareness does not occur in a vacuum or at a single moment. Rather, it unfolds across life stages, shaped by memory and intergenerational dialogue. Youth (Carter) marks the stage of awakening, adulthood (Ambai) emphasizes negotiation and continuity, and old age (Munro) offers retrospective reconstruction. Together, these authors highlight that feminist subjectivity is not static but evolves dynamically across time.

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