



Research Paper

Navigating Mystical Discourse in *So Long a Letter*

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Abstract:

Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* unfolds the spiritual, emotional, and psychological lives of its characters, particularly the protagonist, Ramatoulaye. It integrates mysticism and spirituality within the post-colonial context of Senegal by emphasizing upon the mysterious journeys that transcend the material concerns of life, loss, and betrayal. The paper also intends to make a discourse upon Bâ's mystical experiences and spiritual reflections as personal and collective liberation; showcasing how mysticism serves as both a path to healing and a resistance to oppressive societal norms.

Keyword: *Mysticism, Spirituality, Individuality, Collectivity and Resilience.*

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So Long a Letter (1979) is a poignant exploration of the struggles and resilience of women in post-colonial Senegal. Geographical and social brutalities of this location integrates with psychological impact to its natives and eco-system. The multi-disciplinary study of this text yet signifies a psychological, social, political and historical periphery but dominants the cultural study by emphasizing upon the significant artefacts. It's protagonist Ramatoulaye, introduced epistolary form by addressing letters to the widowed mother and a friend, named Aissatou. The text unravels with themes of love, betrayal, societal expectations, and individuality; meanwhile lights upon material realities—such as social class, gender, and politics—it also subtly integrates mystical and spiritual elements. These elements further unravels not only the collective consciousness but also the individual integrity to circumstances for instance the faith in anonymous presence for healing and concern. This shift from material to metaphorical presence yet signifies a kind of paganism as we found in the Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. While incorporated with nature, supernatural machinery, psychological disorder and a kind of cultural hierarchy; it points towards the deeply rooted ignorance and marginalization that hinders socio-political binaries.

Through the protagonist's bildungsroman journey, Bâ allows her characters to transcend the material world through mystical reflections and spiritual experiences, offering them an avenue for healing, self-discovery, and resistance against a patriarchal society as we found in the critical texts of prominent feminist critiques for instance Virginia Woolf, Helen Cixous, Simon de Beauvoir and Kate Millet. *So Long a Letter* incorporates mysticism, i.e. considered as essential for understanding the deeper spiritual dimensions of post-colonial identity and the healing process of women like Ramatoulaye. The spiritual healing of one's consciousness is also highlighted by few African authors like Sefi Atta in *Everything Good Will Come*, Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, Ben Okri in *The Famished Road*, and Alice Walker in *Color Purple*.

Thomas Carlyle,s also lights upon the mystical ideas, particularly how nature reflects and expresses spiritual truths that we find incorporating with Mariam Ba's textuality and inter- textuality in weaving the complex plot, imagery and historicity. Mysticism is often considered as the pursuit of a deeper, transcendent connection to the divine or to a higher state of being. *So Long a Letter* manifests that imbibed element of mystic dimension through Ramatoulaye's reflections on life, love and suffering; although the novel is primarily concerned with the material challenges of post-colonial life, but it also offers spiritual decoding of events and experiences that help the characters to navigate these challenges. Thereby, Ramatoulaye's sense of divine presence during her individual suffering considered as significant spiritual experience in embracing the solidarity, collective consciousness and memory based shift. After the betrayal by Modou, husband of

Ramatoulaye, she embarks on a spiritual journey that transcends the materiality of her pain. For instance, she reflects on her grief as both a personal loss and a spiritual examination- “I am no longer the woman I was. I have become a woman of sorrow, seeking the divine in my solitude, questioning my faith, and finding solace only in the whispers of my soul” (Bâ, 95). In this reflection, Ramatoulaye acknowledges her suppressed emotions, yet there is a sense that her suffering is not merely physical or emotional—it is also spiritual. Her quest for divine solace reflects the mystical journey of transcending the pain and seeking for spiritual symbolism.

Epistolary form of the text also plays an important role in its spiritual and mystical dimensions like *Colour Purple*'s protagonist portrayed. Writing a letter, especially one addressed to a close friend, serves as a form of spiritual communication that indicates toward the collectivity and individuality. Ramatoulaye's act of writing becomes a form of catharsis and meditation, a way to make sense of her complex feelings. Through the letter, she connects with her own inner self, but she also invites her friend Aissatou into this intimate, spiritual dialogue- “As I write to you, Aissatou, I am not only recounting the events of my life; I am seeking to understand them, to draw meaning from them. It is as if my pen is an extension of my soul, tracing the path toward clarity and peace” (Bâ, p. 103). The letter-writing process becomes a mystical act, enabling Ramatoulaye to transcend the material world of her grief and loss and move into a space of spiritual reflection. By articulating her thoughts and emotions, Ramatoulaye is engaged in a dialogue with the divine, using the letter as both a tool for self-expression and a spiritual exercise that allows her to transcend the material concerns of her life.

Beyond individual healing, mysticism in *So Long a Letter* also acts as a form of resistance to societal expectations, specifically those related to gender. Ramatoulaye's mystical journey can be seen as an act of reclaiming her autonomy within a patriarchal society that demands women centric domination and submission. It draws our attention towards the structural engineering of society and cultural acceptance. It reflects a society of silent women under the dominance of patriarchy; thereby Ramatoulaye's portrayal of both material and spiritual perspectives can be incorporated with the voice politics like Eckhart made a discourse upon the mystical experience of being present and the ways nature facilitate this spiritual awakening. Ramatoulaye's mystical experiences also interrogates her to challenge the objectifying tendencies of patriarchal culture. As she wrestles with the material realities of her situation, her spiritual discourses leads her to envision herself as more than just a wife or a mother. For instance, after learning of her husband's betrayal, she undergoes a spiritual reawakening that challenges the traditional roles expected of her- “The pain is unbearable, but it is also a door that opens to a new understanding. I am not just a woman abandoned; I am a soul in search of itself, free from the chains of tradition” (Bâ, p. 120).

Ramatoulaye equates her suffering with a kind of spiritual awakening. She rejects the traditional role of a passive, submissive wife and instead embraces a more autonomous and spiritual identity. Through mysticism, protagonist transcends her material suffering and renders into a life beyond the structural norms of patriarchal monopoly.

In *So Long a Letter*, mysticism also intersects with the theme of the divine feminine. Throughout the novel, Ramatoulaye's reflections on womanhood and spirituality are intertwined with her understanding of the divine. She frequently references her faith in God, but she also grapples with the notion of divine justice and the role of women in a world shaped by patriarchal norms.

Gary's collection of essays explores the spirituality inherent in nature, with an emphasis on mysticism and indigenous practices unlike the protagonist of *So Long a Letter* for instance Ramatoulaye manifests her faith in the consequences of betrayal and loss: “I have questioned God, I have cried out to Him in my despair, yet in His silence, I have found a deeper peace, a deeper understanding of my place in this world. Perhaps the divine does not speak to us in words, but in silence, in the stillness of our hearts” (Bâ, 127). Thus it portrays that Ramatoulaye's relationship with the divine is mysterious to readers and she no longer seeks answers in the material world or in the actions of others, but instead embraces peace in silence and stability of her own soul and mental state, a space where she can connect with the divine in ways that transcend traditional religious practice. It adequately incorporated with the Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*; where she advocates for the individuality in the physical, psychological and metaphorical world.

Through the character of Ramatoulaye, Mariama Bâ explores the possibility of mystical journeys as a means of transcending the material concerns of life in post-colonial Senegal. The novel showcases mysticism not only as a medium of healing personal wounds but also as a form of resistance against the oppressive forces of patriarchy and societal expectation. Ramatoulaye's mystical reflections, expressed through letter-writing and spiritual introspection, offer a path to personal liberation and self-discovery. By engaging with the mystical,

Ramatoulaye transforms her pain into a profound spiritual journey unlike Celie in *Color Purple* one that moves beyond the material world and renders into understanding of the self, society and the divine.

Thus, *So Long a Letter* unfolds a powerful exploration of mysticism as a tool for resilience and empowerment, serves to illuminate the complex intersection of spirituality, gender and post-colonial identity. Ramatoulaye's journey is not just one of personal growth but also one that resonates with the collective struggles of women navigating the tumultuous terrain of post-colonial life.

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