



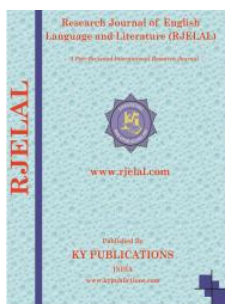
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DIASPORIC EXPERIENCE IN AMY TAN'S *THE KITCHEN GOD'S WIFE* AND *THE BONESETTER'S DAUGHTER*

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ABSTRACT

Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Bonesetter's daughter* novels are dealing mother –daughter relationship in the diasporic country. And it focuses on the first generation mother's struggle in facing new culture, language and their problems with second generation western fascinated daughters. Generally diaspora deals the problems of protagonists' external forces like culture, language, racism, sexism but in Tan's novels the external forces make discomfort and misunderstanding between Chinese tradition mothers and American modern daughters.

Key words: Bonesetter, first generation, discomfort, fascinated, tradition, modern

Introduction

Chinese Diaspora happened throughout the history. The mass immigration happened after 1949 due to effect of war and economical problem. Before the World War they immigrate to many countries but the first Chinese immigration towards America begins very early in the year of 1820s because they believed America is the Golden Mountain so they voluntarily moved to America to earn. The Chinese American literature is generally discussed under the terms of Asian American literature and diasporic literature.

Diasporic Experience in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*

The first generation Chinese American women are the centre of Tan's novels. Scarlet Cheng mentioned Amy Tan's interview in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* thus: "I always find that it's necessary to write with some reader in mind, and for me that someone is always my mother" (qtd. in Hunter and Timothy 371). Most of the works of Tan

reflects her mother. As the first generation Chinese Americans Winnie and LuLing live in two different cultures. And they do a vital role as daughters in China and dominant mothers in America. And they are not only having the alienated experience in diasporic country but also in their own native country among the patriarchal society. And in migrated country they cannot adapt and embrace the new culture and language. This cultural and language tension with their daughters lead them to misunderstanding and make generational gap between mothers and daughters in diasporic country.

They have two strong reasons to migrate from China to America. The Second World War and their failure in family life lead them to the diasporic experience. Generally the people forced or volunteered themselves to the diaspora. Winnie and LuLing migrated to America due to the effect of War and their family problem. Thus they were indirectly forced to the diasporic experience in 1912.

Being the first generation Chinese American women Winnie and LuLing struggled a lot because they cannot adapt and accept the new culture. In Kitchen God's wife Winnie survived a hard life in China by her first husband Wen Fu. After the Second World War she settled in America with her American husband, Jimmy Louie and daughter Pearl. The saddest truth is Jimmy Louie Was not Pearl's genetic father and her father Was Chinese Wen Fu. Later she revealed the truth to her daughter Pearl about her hard life in China and her first husband Wen Fu is her genetic father.

Winnie had started her alienated life from her own family in China at the age of six. Her actual name is Jiang Weili later her name changed as Winnie by her American lovable husband. Even after she settled in America she lived as a typical Chinese woman. New culture and language make her discomfort. Since she was married to a man in America, she tried to suppress her own religious beliefs in favor of her husband. It shows that being a Chinese American she cannot change herself to other culture and she is not able to follow her own traditions and religion as her wish.

New culture and language made gap between Winnie and her daughter. When her daughter Pearl read about the Second World War, as a Chinese mother Winnie tried to teach about Sino-Japan war but Pearl hesitated to hear and shouted that she only need American history not Chinese history. She taught Pearl how to speak with others with manners but later she hesitated to speak with her own daughter because her ignorance in English language. Even though she settled in Western country her life became difficult due to the lack of courage and confidence. As a second generation Chinese American Pearl didn't need her mother's tradition and culture and she attracted towards American culture and she wanted to lead a life style of America.

The life of young Winnie from orphan to abused wife, and as a Chinese American her language problem keeps going on. Though she spoke to her daughter in English, she took attempt to teach her Chinese words when she lacks for English words. Even Winnie in urgent need of money from

her dowry account, she sent a telegram to her cousin Peanut "Hurry, we are soon taonam" (259).

In *The Bonesetter's Daughter* as a first generation Chinese American, LuLing lived alone in San Francisco and suffered due to the old age and loss of memory. She often told her daughter Ruth to translate her writings about the life from China to America. In diasporic community LuLing had many problems so she had memory loss very early and she cannot remember her past life and the secret. Like Winnie and Pearl, LuLing and Ruth have misunderstanding among the diasporic community. LuLing was unable to adapt the American culture and language so her English was poor. When Ruth was in school age, she played with other girls particularly with poor girl Teresa. At that time LuLing followed her and scolded in front of others in poor English with Chinese slang. So it made a gap between mother and daughter in their relationship at the very early stage of their life.

Brought up in western culture Ruth started to live with her boy friend and LuLing lived alone in the diasporic country. Now and then Ruth met her mother and went with her to hospital for regular medical checkup. When LuLing visited the doctor she was not clear in her speech and murmured about her precious auntie to whom she wanted to ask sorry for her mistakes. Due to her strange behavior doctor advised Ruth to keep LuLing always with someone's company because being alone will make her even worse. When LuLing's family gathered for party she said to Ruth that the precious auntie is her mother.

LuLing played a vital role as a daughter to precious auntie in China and mother for Ruth in America. Ruth always followed the American culture and she didn't share anything to her traditional mother. So she cannot understand when her daughter maintained some secrets in her life and it affected their relationship, "They could not trust each other. That was how dishonesty and betrayal started, not in big lies but in small secrets" (139).

In *The Bonesetter's Daughter* cultural assimilation is extremely challenging for LuLing. She had already lived a great deal of her life in China before making her way to the United States. LuLing

learned English by listening to others' speech. Her daughter didn't like this because LuLing spoke with British accent, and she wrongly pronounced the words and thought some words have different meaning. Ruth had to translate often or speak for her mother, "she felt ten years old again, translating for her mother how the world worked, explaining the rules, the restrictions, the time limits on money back guarantees," (65). She never liked this so it hurt their relationship at an early stage.

There is a distinction between Ruth and LuLing adapting American life. LuLing refused to change for American culture and Ruth refused to follow the Chinese tradition. This difference was due to their thought about culture as superior and inferior. The first generation is always in inferior among the superior American culture. They cannot stretch their hands among the dominant culture so the next generation automatically followed to the superior American culture.

In the Asian culture boy friend and dating are strictly prohibited. So the first generation like LuLing in America could not tolerate such things. So LuLing didn't want her daughter to have boy friend or to smoke. But for Ruth these are the normal because she brought up in western culture and LuLing felt ashamed and shouted at her and compared the cultural differences. LuLing says "why I have daughter like you? Why I live? Why I don't die long time ago? LuLing was huffing and shouting."(140)

LuLing also explained how the Chinese women respect their elders. And she also compared the culture of China and America. In China working people are very busy but in America they are lazy. These kinds of difference raised the generation gap between LuLing and her daughter in the diasporic country. LuLing followed Chinese family system in which an individual cannot decide anything without others knowledge but in western culture individuality and their own decision is more important. So when Ruth leaves her to live with Art, LuLing asked her to live with him after marriage. But Ruth never mind about her mother's lecture and moved away. This upset LuLing psychologically.

In a diaspora the first generation didn't have any ventilation for their emotions because in a new culture they suppress themselves. The recollections were only recovery of their depressed and suppressed life. As warriors of life they gave life for their daughters. Their sacrifice was permanent, for they left their people in China and came to America to live a children-centered life. They basically had no safety network of people in America. Now, in their old age, they had to trust that they could be dependent on their daughters and that this Americanized younger generation would not abandon them. Adult children were being responsible to take care of their elderly parents even though they are in western culture. Most importantly, these mothers did not give up hope.

Conclusion

Diaspora is confusion and conflicts of various issues and experiences. In the first generation women's life, some men were devils and some men were saviors. Their sharing with their daughters about the life in China helps them to ventilate their hard memories in their mind. As a first generation they controlled their emotions and followed own tradition and culture.

The first generation Chinese American women faced many problems before and after the migration to United States. They reached their destination with their will power among the horrible society. Their superior hope lead them in superior culture. Their names also change as their culture Winnie called weili and Helen called Hulan. These names needed for the diasporic community. And the first generations had indirectly forced and they willingly came to migration. Even they started a new life in the east and the western cultures made them to feel uncomfortable.

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