

**Tribhuvan University**

**Mother-Daughter Bond in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English**

**By**

**Dhana Raj Rai**

**Central Department of English**

**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

**April, 2011**

**Tribhuvan University**  
**Central Department of English**

**Letter of Recommendation**

Mr. Dhana Raj Rai has completed his thesis entitled "Mother-Daughter Bond in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*" under my supervision. He carried his research from October 2010 to April 2011. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

---

Mr. Deepak Giri

(Supervisor)

Date: 2067/ - /-

**Tribhuvan University**  
**Central Department of English**

**Letter of Approval**

This thesis entitled "Mother-Daughter bond in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Dhana Raj Rai has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Internal Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

External Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Head/Coordinator

\_\_\_\_\_

Central Department of English

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my compendius supervisor Mr. Deepak Giri for his invaluable supervision and guidance without whose precious assistance, this thesis would not have received the current decipherable form.

Moreover, I am highly indebted to Dr. Amma Raj Joshi, the Head of the Central Department of English for his constant encouragement and for providing me an apt atmosphere for its successful completion. I am equally grateful to all my respected teachers including Dr. Birendra Pandey, Saroj Sharma Ghimire, Ghanshyam Sharma and Dr. Sanjeev Upreti for their constructive comments, scholarly guidance, invaluable materials and informations for this research work.

I would like to thank my parents Ratna Bahadur Rai and Maya Rai, brothers Puspa Raj Rai, Tula Raj Rai, Ek Raj Rai and Sukra Raj Rai for their continuous help in preparing this thesis. Finally, my sincere thanks go to Mr. Ramesh Maharjan (Dynamic Computer and Photocopy Service, Tyanglaphant) for his excellent computer typing and printing.

April 2011

Dhana Raj Rai

## **Abstract**

This dissertation has carried out the study of a cultural encounter that is the demonstration of the efforts of Chinese American to find the middle ground between the Chinese and American as well as ways of life in Amy Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*. The novel deals with the issues that arise out of immigrants and their children due to difference of cultural upbringing. The novel thus articulates this dual consciousness emerging from emigrant experience and yet represents desire for reconciliation between these two cultural heritages.

## Table of Contents

	<b>Page No.</b>
I. A Summary of <i>The Kitchen God's Wife</i>	1-12
II. Identity Crisis	13-21
III. Mother-Daughter Bond in Amy Tan's <i>The Kitchen God's Wife</i>	22-40
IV. Conclusion	41-43
Works Cited	44-45

## **I. A Summary of *The Kitchen God's Wife***

The novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, (published) in 1991 is about the Chinese immigrants who are living in America since the Second World War. Winnie is the main character and her interrelationship with other characters lead the plot of the novel. The setting of the novel is drawn from the present America to the past, pre-communist China. Winnie is a widow. She lives in Chinatown, San Francisco where she owns a small flower shop with her lifelong friend Helen. Pearl is her daughter. She is married to a non-Chinese husband with two daughters and they live in San-Jose. Pearl and Winnie have a trouble in understanding to each other ever since Pearl was a child. Pearl sees her mother as a very conservative, superstitious and typical Chinese women, on the other hand, Winnie sees her daughter, Pearl as a short of completely Americanized; with no interest and respect for the Chinese culture. Because of their negative attitude towards each other, they not only often criticize one another but they also do not reveal their innermost secrets so their relation is more complicated. The novel begins with the same awful feeling of Pearl about their relationship. In this way, this thesis tries to show the conflict between two Chinese worn out culture and the American modern culture.

Pearl has health problem-multiple sclerosis, but she has not told about it to her mother. In the same way Winnie has always kept her past life in China secret from Pearl too. Helen is the only one who knows all about it. In a way she also makes them to tell about their secrets. She enforces Winnie. Eventually, Winnie also deciding no more to keep her things as a secret from her daughter, she makes Pearl to revisit her again. She makes an excuse of getting heartache and calls Pearl to visit her any time soon again in Chinatown. Pearl rushes back, though in fact she has just returned to San-Jose, her home spending a few days there with her mother and in some social

engagements. Then as she arrives, Winnie tells Pearl everything about her past life in China and upto that entire how she finally came to America.

Winnie tells she had lost her beautiful young mother when she was only six. Her mother was an educated urban Sanghai women, but the fourth wife of her father. Her mother suddenly disappeared, still leaving it as a mystery to her because she was never told what had exactly happened to her mother. Then she was sent to stay with her uncle's family in a remote area. In her new home, she was not loved as equally as her cousin sister where even her mother's name was considered as the family shame and she was never allowed to talk about her mother. So the experience of losing mother in childhood was very painful to her.

As a teenage, Winnie was married to Wen Fu, who used to be her cousin sister Peanut's boyfriend first. But after he came to know as a respectful man in Shanghai, he came to her uncle's house with the marriage proposal for her. Despite her uncle's family already seemed to be known about Wen Fu's bad characters, non of them rejected it. Instead, they all eagerly married her off. At that time, in China a girl did not even have a right to express her feelings and choices so she married him thinking may be her new life with him would be better. But shattering all her hope, her marriage life only turned into more doom. Wen Fu turned out to be a very moody, unkind and disloyal husband. No matter how hard she tried to please him as a dutiful wife in every aspects of married life, he was never satisfied and she was always looked down. The time, she was living her desperate life, was also the peak period of the Cultural Revolution in China. Not only the nationalists Party and the Revolutionary party were fighting with each other but how the country was caught up in Japanese invation as well. So it was wartime; the sense of fear, confusion and insecurity was intense. Booming and attacks had badly disrupted every civilian's lives,

pushing them into more poverty, feminine and deaths. So in the novel, the national tragedy and Winnie's personal tragedy go together.

As Wen Fu was in the air force of the Chinese military, Winnie had to always move with other military families from one place to another. In the same process of their mobility, she happened to meet Helen as a wife of another military man in the Air force while later she also met Jimmy Louise. Winnie and Helen became friends because they had to share the same fate as wives of the military men. However, in terms of sensibility and sensitivity they always seemed to be completely different from each other. Though they have been like close friends and sisters since then back in China, Winnie is still in some way skeptical about Helen. For instance, Winnie still believes Helen has a habit of making things up plausible that she has been fooled many times before. So this time she does not even let Helen to tell her past to Pearl, instead she tells it herself and she does not want her real story to be twisted up. Otherwise, Pearl would only misunderstand her in more negative way that would make their relationship much worse.

Jimmy, her second husband was the only person who genuinely loved doing everything to make her happy. He was a very jovial, friendly and decent Chinese-American. When Winnie first met him during the wartime, he was working with the United States Information Service as a translator for American volunteers. Then Winnie met him many years later unexpectedly in the street of Shanghai again while her married life was worsening more. None of her babies, whom she loved most, succeeded to survive; all her three babies died one after another, in wartime, Wen Fu had become increasingly more violent and abusive. Bringing women at home and keeping them as long as he wished seemed like an usual affair to him. So Winnie had come to realize that her situation with him will never be improved and she was

seeking help to get a divorce and in her same hopeless condition she met Jimmy again, Jimmy liked her since the first time he saw her and knew about Wen Fu was bad. Now, as he came to learn that Winnie's traumatic married life was not changed at all even after years had passed by, it not only made him feel sorry for her but it also made him to take a step forward to take her hands and to stand there for her protection, because in all possible ways, he wanted to see her life changed and happy, so he married Winnie. It helped her to rescue for both her traumatic life and her first wicked husband, but in China her new married life would not be possible because Wen Fu was revengefully chasing her that she was even raped by him. Later she came to America as Jimmy's wife where he gave her all love, hope and joy that she deserved and Pearl was born in America as the daughter of Jimmy, though she was conceived after the rape.

In this way, Winnie had to come to America not because she did not love her country but she only wanted to get rid of her first wicked husband and coming to America was only her last resort. However, China still seems in her heart, thought and mannerism even if she has been living in America for a long time and she also thinks it is natural for her to be looked as a typical and asentric mother in the eyes of Pearl.

Finally, Winnie's disclosure gives Pearl all insight of the life her mother had led back then in the midst of the chaotic historical period of China. It makes her realize that how she has been always judgemental about her mother looking through only western version and that was her biggest mistake. Overall she not only gets the better understanding about her mother but as a mother and daughter they ultimately become closer as well. In this way, Tan talks about the generational and cultural clash in the novel.

Amy Tan is the Chinese American writer and the novelist. She was the second child for her Chinese immigrant parents. She was born in 1952 in Oakland, California. Her name was given from Chinese word An-mai; means "Blessing of America". At the age of 19, she became half orphan as she had to lose her father and elder brother within months of each other. Afterwards, her mother took her and a brother to Switzerland. And there she finished her schooling also. In 1969, they were back to America and finished her University from San Jose University in 1973. At the age of 22, she was engaged in family life with Lou De Mattei.

She was very much interested since her young age in language and literature. She began her career as a language development consultant for disabled children and a technical freelance writer, but eventually being dissatisfied with her workcholic habit she thought of changing her work doing something new and different so she started Jazz piano lessons and writing fiction instead. Although her early writing effort had actually come to her as a form of therapy, later it turned out to be the most mesmerizing discovery of her own genius in writing. Her first story "The Rules of the Games" initially secured her position in the Squaw Valley Community of writers in 1985 that later became a part of her first novel as well.

More surprisingly, her first novel *The Joy Luck Club* after its publication in March 1989 constantly went nine months on the New York Time Bestseller than any other book of that year. It was simultaneously nominated for various awards and even succeeded to receive three of them: Common wealth Club Gold award for fiction, Bay Area Book Reviewers awards for best fiction and American Library Association best book for young adults award. The novel was translated into seventeen foreign languages and adapted in the movie version as well. All this assumed her more to take the literary career ahead as a writer and she has been writing ever since. Her other

three novels, two children books, essays and short stories have been already published. All her works have not only given her popularity in a wider international level but she has also been successfully counted as one phenomenal writer, among many other writers. In this regard, Tamara S. Wagner expresses his view about Amy Tan:

Amy Tan is undoubtedly a western writer, even though her subject matter, settings, and themes are concerned with the East, or more specifically, with meeting of East and West, with cultural as well as ethnic hybridity, and with writing the other. The most conspicuous aspect of other work is that the Chinese characters in her novels the Chinese mother and half sister of the American main protagonists are other. (5)

*The Joy Luck Club*, her major achievement set in 1980 in San Francisco, explores the complicated relationship between the four Chinese immigrant mothers and their American born daughters. In the novel their juxtaposed feelings, fear and hope and love and hate, created by the generational difference are depicted in a very bitter humorous way.

*The Kitchen God's Wife* published in 1991, is also Tan's another second novel about the mother-daughter relationship. Throughout the novel, mother Winnie reveals her past life in China to her American-born daughter Pearl and the daughter eventually comes to realize the essence of her old eccentric mother, it is then they acquire an emotional bonding.

Yuan Yuan expresses his view towards the Kingston and Tan comparatively. Both are responsible for reconstruction of American experience in Chinese culture

that supports for cultural construction instead of separated, displaced and alienated personality. As he says:

Both Kingston and Tan write to reconstitute the American experience through the strategy of different, highlighting the importance of difference within American cultures by challenging the status quo of American identity. Both argue for participation in cultural construction instead of remaining in a stereotypical position as temporary sojourners alienated and displaced personalities. I believe that gesture challenges the very constitution of the Americanness of American culture and identity. (9)

In her third novel, *The Hundred Secret Sense* published in 1995, Tan focus is on the sisterhood between half sisters-Kwan and Olivia. As an exotic Chinese sister Olivia takes her skeptical American sister Kwan to the mystical world of the Chinese spiritual life, Kwan eventually receives the balance in her personal life as well which she has been failed to maintain before.

The *Bonesetter's Daughter* in Tan's fourth novel published in 2001. The autobiographical elements of Tan's own mother Daisy's life are much more focused in this novel than in her previous ones. So it basically brings out her own mother's life from China to America, who died in 1999.

Tan once remarked in a Bestsellers interview that is an earlier age she had tried to distance herself from her Chinese background. Her fiction writing, she said, helped her to discover "how very Chinese I was. And how much had stayed with me that I had tried to deny."

Regarding the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), different critics have analyzed differently since its publication. However the ideas or criticism that arises

out of cultural aspects is worth mentioning here. There were two sorts of characters brought up in two diverse cultural milieus that pave the way for confrontation. Due to this cultural affiliation, there was misunderstanding and miscommunication between the mother and daughter. In this regard, Thomas Rigs argues:

*The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) focuses on single mother and daughter pair, Winnie and Pearl and the female relationship that supports Winnie through her nightmarish first marriage. Both Winnie and Pearl keep secrets from each other [. . .] the secrecy hinders their mutual understanding. (285)

Brought up fully in America, Pearl makes her choices being fully an American than her mother Winnie. Longing for her own identity, Winnie is different from her daughter. So they don't understand each other properly since they have different upbringing at the beginning of the novel. In this regard, C.L. Chau opines: "Amy Tan deals poignantly with problems in mother, daughter-husband and wife and native immigrant relationships" (24).

Since mother and daughter have distinct upbringing, it leads them to cultural confrontation between them. Due to this reason even they hide their secrets as C.L. Chau comments:

The novel opens with lack of communication between Weili Jiang (Winnie) an immigrant-generation Chinese mother, and her thoroughly American daughter, Pearl. Pearl can not tell her mother about her multiple sclerosis, while Weili keeps secret her past in China, especially her doubts about Pearl's paternity. (1)

Later in this novel, when mother Winnie tells about her Chinese past the communication between mother and daughter becomes fruitful. Pearl learns her

mother's desperate life in China as Harper Collins publisher writes about this novel as, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), a daughter again learns of mother's Chinese past, a harrowing tale of women from different classes thrown together in desperate in China, separated and reunited in the United State" (990).

Similarly, Donna Seaman describes the situation of Winnie and her arranged marriage in China differentiating it with her daughter's life. She remarks:

Tan follows her spectacularly successful debut, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), with another winner. Pressed to tell her American-born daughter the truth about her life in China, Winnie unburdens herself of old angers and fears recounting her violent, war-wrenched youth and the barbaric tranny of her arranged marriage. (1)

Each and every people belong to the cultural groups who have their own distinct cultural norms, values, traditions and beliefs. These values transfer from generation to generation as a form of myth. In this light, critic Shapiro analyzes this text as:

At the center of *The Kitchen God's Wife* is an absorbing narrative of Winnie Louie's life, which she tells or offers-as a gift to her daughter Pearl. Much happens on the telling: long held secrets are revealed and a family's myth are transferred ceremoniously to the next generation. (2)

When Winnie is able to be a 'real mother' of her daughter, she plays a motherly role telling her their family myths which have been burdens of Chinese women for their independent life in the society. In this context, Winnie becomes a storyteller by breaking the hegemonic tradition telling female stories to female listeners.

Apart from cultural approach other many approaches are also applied by different critics. Many critics viewed this book differently. Yuan Yuan analyzes this

book in the light of feminism. He says: "The novel is based on Winnie's painful experiences in China. Infact, the pain and suffering that are central to Winnie's recollection rather than recall" (3). As he has commented on Winnie's suffering that causes her to gain courage to struggle against the Chinese patriarchal society for the emancipation.

The novel is also the comic description of late twentieth century generational clashes in the United States and historical representation of the World War II invading Japanese soldiers in China. Tan brings parallel references in the novel between Japan's invasion over China and husband's domination over Winnie. This can be realized when Bella Adams views:

In addition to discussing Japan's hostility towards China, Weilli articulates her experiences at the hand of monstrous Wen Fu. *The Kitchen God's Wife* represents both Rape of Nanking and the rape of Weilli, drawing attention to the similarities between the Japanese military and a Chinese husband. (16)

Thus, Adams, finds this novel based on the representation of history as she says, "*The Kitchen God's Wife* lends itself to an interrogation of history from theoretical view point in two related ways. First, the link between history and ideologies is unmasked" (21). Pearl therefore, faces difficulties in American multicultural society. Hyphenated experience such as Chinese-American always brings the issues of identity to the fore. The struggle is mostly illustrated through the character of Pearl, who is American born but is raised in household with Chinese customs and traditions. It is difficult for someone like her to live in the space between being fully American or fully Chinese. It seems that she has tried to abandon her Chinese heritage and tries to avoid it at all costs and she does not want to go 'home' and she feels a distance from her mother.

Throughout the novel, her mother, Winnie remembers the instances when Pearl had been hesitant to learn about her Chinese past. But story telling integrates mother-daughter relationship. Hence, the gaps or distance seen between mother and daughter at the beginning immediately gets resolved or collapsed and mutual understanding and cooperation occurs when Winnie poignantly narrates her Chinese past. Feeling of Chinese heritage provides some sort of relief despite the fact that Pearl has various problems.

The present research, therefore, has nothing to do with the technique, style and other qualities of the novel. Rather it has something to do with the brief introduction of American culture where Pearl is brought up and Chinese culture where her cultural heritage is affiliated.

Pearl, American born woman is brought up in California fully dominated by modern American culture. As an American born daughter of immigrants, Pearl has no direct access to Chinese heritage. The Chinese culture with Pearl's heritage attached is strictly characterized by 'male supremacy'. All the women were bound by Confucianism and principle of morality that believed women as submissive and 'holy sex' without passion. As Winnie narrates her Chinese past, her mother and herself too got constantly dominated by their husbands. Her past was horrible because the society strictly confined them within the narrow boundaries of domesticity such as cooking, child caring, sewing etc. They were expected to be chaste and obedient to their husbands, and motherly and protective to their children. Winnie thus, reminds her daughter their painful past that was fully dominated by male ideology. The traditional Chinese society is entirely different from that of modern American culture. As Barbara Burdick says in the Peninsula Herald: "No other people have remained so mysterious to westerners as the inscrutable Chinese. Even the word China brings to

mind ancient situations, exotic teas, superstitious silks and fire-breathing dragons" (11).

Pearl at the beginning seems to be more Americanized woman. Eventhough Pearl's life is not foreign to Winnie, and she thinks that Pearl lived with a mixture as well. But no doubt, Pearl lived in America filled with American/English, influences. 'Western thought' that centers upon the freedom of individual more or less affects the life of Pearl. The unwillingness of Pearl to participate in the engagement party along with funeral procession eventhough Winnie forced her to come, proves the fact of Pearl's westernization but the story telling awakes the transition from the position of separation and alienation to that of accommodation and reposition by initiating a positive self invention. The more difficulties and horrible past Winnie narrates, the closer relation is established between mother and daughter. Non-communication and misunderstanding due to cultural gaps keeps on changing and moves towards the reconciliation when Winnie goes on telling their mysterious past. Pearl ultimately finds a space or identity through the integration or reconciliation of cultures.

## II. Identity Crisis

The problems that are related to culture and identity can be solved in relation to culture itself. The expression of culture is inextricably bound up with the notion of Identity. People express their identity: they question it if they find the difficulty of belonging; they seek their relation to the source culture; and thereby try to establish their identity. Identity as such has been a topical issue in the study of culture, and the concept of identity is in crisis. Almost everywhere the people say that this crisis is caused by globalization, a concept responsible for the experience of migrancy, altering relations between Western and other cultures and the sense of identity of the individuals whose lives have taken across the borders between so-called the first worlds, the second worlds, and the third worlds, or across in effect, pre-modern and postmodern societies.

The globalization in its long run has caused the interfusing of identities which can be termed as "the hybridity of cultural identity". This notion of hybridity suggests that it has relation to 'racial' and 'ethnic' identities. Moreover, these identities are not pure but are the product of mixing, fusion and corealization, following the mixing and movements of cultures. Specially from the slave trade to mass media, there lies the great shape of modern identities. The result is the fusion or hybridity of identities which can not be taken as the product of 'assimilation' of one culture or cultural tradition by another, but product of something new. This new notion of identity is equated with the studies of the hybridity of cultural identity that are closely allied to accounts to diaspora identities. Diaspora is a worked that was initially used to refer to the dispersal of Jewish people across the globe, but is now regularly used to describe black and other diaspora. These identities are shaped by this sense of having been, in Salman Rushdie's phrase, "born across the world", of being in but not entirely of the

West. A number of Anglo American critics now agree that V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rusdie and some prominent writers find a unique and a fertile place from where they can write about their anguish towards the West as well as they can express a haunting search for their cultural identity. They, therefore, seek their belonging and write about that. Their writings are full of cultural expression relying on the fact that the notion of cultural identity in fact is problematic and they struggle to adjust as well as assimilate with the new notions of identities by both aspects: failure and success.

The identities are fluid, and are both consciously and unconsciously delimited. Any number of factors are likely to be under negotiation in either case; whether of religion, nation, language, political ideology or cultural expression. One example can be Islam; a religious faith that shapes the social, economic and political character of entire regimes and can reach into the detailed social and sexual lives of its adherents.

The reality should expose the fact that developments in theory have accompanied the general social processes indicated above and have played their part in underlying, and providing a vocabulary for, a changing awareness of many subtleties of identity and of the allied affirmation of a given identity in relation onto its supposed binary opposite. Stuart Hall observed the scene with the people creating their new but both constructed and emergent subject. Hall believes that cultural identity exists only in the representation. So he puts:

It is not transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the cultural practices then represent, we should think instead of identity as a 'production' which is never complete always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation. This view problematizes the very

authority and authenticity to which the terms, 'cultural identity' lays claim. (110)

His idea is that whoever "write and speak from a particular place and time, from history and culture which is specific," get their 'I' "enunciated" (110). He, nevertheless, agree to the point that, cultural identity is defined in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common (110-111). So our cultural identities: [. . .] reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us as 'one people' with stable unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting division and vicissitudes of our actual history (111). Hall's idea of identity is that it has no fixed archaeology but has become a "retelling of the past" (112). The re-telling creates crucial images that offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation which is the history of all enforced diasporas. Since their history intervenes, idea of 'difference' plays a vital role to define themselves as "what we really are" (112). This traumatic condition of identity can be understood as the "character of the colonial experience.

Hall after all, comes to conclude the fact that cultural identity "is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture" (113). But it can not be more phantasm either, as he says:

It is something not a mere trick of the immigration. It has its histories and histories have their real material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past' since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through

memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are made within the discourses of history and culture. Hence, this is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has an guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'. (113)

Hall's emphasis quoted above throws a light to the spectrum of the dynamics of cultural identity. His ideas that cultural identity is "always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" can be taken as his great contribution to the thinking that there is the relation existing between cultural identity and expression. The representation of identities themselves is expressed through writings. V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe and a number of writers come in the same concern. They identify the "Difference". Hall posits the view that Caribbean people have neither their earlier identity (i.e. just and illusion) nor a new European identity (i.e. imposed upon them) but have their unique doubleness and the search for it results in "the shock of the 'doubleness' of similarity and difference' (114). So, Hall finds the term, cultural identity can never be settled.

Identity has become the major concern in cultural studies since 1990s. Identities are perceived within the domain of cultural studies that has no essential or universal qualities. They are not things which exist, rather they are discursive constructions. Identity is defined in terms of one shared culture. Cultural study reflects the common historical experience and shared cultural codes which provide oneness. In Balibar's words, "identity is never a peaceful acquisition; it is claimed as a guarantee against on threat of annihilation that can be figured by another identity or by erasing of identities" (86).

Cultural identity is the matter of 'becoming' and 'being' because it belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, it has

history though it undergoes continuous transformation and continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. It is a product which is never complete, always in process and always constituted within, not outside representation. So identity is a sense of belongingness that keeps on changing with the flow of time. In this connection Stuart Hall argues:

Our cultural identity reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provides us, as one people, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of references and meaning beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our cultural history. (111)

So identity is constructed and created by the practice of power and it is made within the discourses of history and culture. In this regard, Hall again writes:

Cultural identity is not fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark. It is not once and for all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute return. [ . . . ] It has its history and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. (113)

The identities subjected and positioned in the dominant regions of representation are the effects of a critical exercises of cultural power and normalization. The dominant and superior culture has the power of influence or dominate the other. However, according to Hall cultural identities are not a fixed essence at all. Similarly they have no universal and transcendental spirit. Thus, identity is not a fixed origin rather it is something which has histories or past, which continually speaks to us. Identities are constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities, thus are the points of identification.

Cultural reconciliation provides a pattern of mutual adjustment of reciprocal give and take by offering a space enough for coexistence such as reconciliation (integration) takes place when one culture is introduced to the culture which is different from it. The meaning of culture likely to offer a space enough for coexistence sharing common liberal traits. Firstly when two or more cultures meet together the confrontation takes place that matches the tensed relation between absence and presence because of their distinct cultural traits of respective cultures. The juxtaposition of cultures, for example, alien and native cultures, generate a moment of reevaluation of prevailing patterns in the light of new experienced insights of life. Though an individual gets proceed for the time being when the distinct cultures meet together but slowly and gradually he/she shares the liberal traits of both cultures that ultimately creates hybrid identity. In other words hybridity cannot create sense of alienation all the time rather is a fertile ground where one can easily exist. Co-operation and juxtaposition between cultures may result either in exchange or mutual support or hostility and conflict. But the context of globalization, encounter of diverse cultural traits and complexities are modified because of the constant contact and cultures and cultural identities become hybrid in betweenness and society multicultural.

The mode of cultural reconciliation is dialogical engagement and interaction where two distinct cultures met, there emerged a conflict. The conflict and the mutual entity are the facts of human relations through which communication or dialogue between cultures is possible where negotiation takes place for mutual and meaningful engagement in a new social and cultural milieu. Here Bakhtin's notion of 'dialogical exchange' may be trustworthy to mention. Dialogical exchange of Bakhtin involves an affirmation of the other exteriority which goes hand in hand with recognition of other

subjects. This exotic relation is 'non-unifying' that is an engagement which preserves reciprocal freedom where no one has the last word and neither voice is reduced to the state of simple object or elevated to the status of a superior subject.

Thus cultural reconciliation or encounter is a process in which various modes take place like interaction, acculturation, assimilation, adaptation, cultural and dialogical engagement.

The term 'hybridity' is generally used in horticulture referring to third species produced by mixing or grafting plants of different species. But it was understood within the domain of postcolonial discourse, hybridity is the result of the bringing together of people and their cultures from different parts of the world. The term is related to the traumatic colonial experience. Hybridity, as defined in Bill Ashcroft's, Gareth Griffith's and Helen Tiffin's book *Key Concepts in Post Colonial Studies*, is "the creation of new trans-cultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (118). In cultural theory these meanings have been extended to refer to the mixed or hyphenated identities of persons or ethnic communities.

Once the colonial settlers arrive in alien land they feel the necessity of establishing new identity since are displaced from their point of origin. In a colonial society there emerged a binary relationship between the peoples of two cultures. It is the 'in-between' space that carries the burden and meaning of cultures and this is what makes the notion of hybridity and its importance. Recently within the domain of cultural studies the term has also been associated with the analysis of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

Hybridization for Ashcroft, Gareth and Griffin takes many forms "Linguistic, cultural political, racial, etc. Linguistic examples include 'pidgin' and 'creole' language" (118). The term hybridity has been recently associated with work of Homi

K. Bhaba's notion of 'ambivalence'. For him 'ambivalence' is the "complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizers and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to colonizer" (12).

Hybridity, Bhaba argues, subverts the narrative of colonial power and dominant colonized cultures. Although it borrows from these both cultures, Bhaba believes hybridity is a position in which hybridized do not belong clearly to the world of either colonizer or the colonized. They are rendered as 'other' from both the cultures. So, hybridity becomes a cultural mix and creates a new form of identity.

Hybrid culture exists also in colonial society where people occupy as in between space by the 'mimicry' of the colonizer. European colonialism has left its cultural mark across the globe and the impact of 'external' culture influences on once colonized society in more complex way than the simple cultural imperialism. In the post imperial era, neither the colonizing or colonized 'culture' 'race' 'language' can remain in 'pure' form. At the same time they can not be separate from each other which gives rise to hybridity.

Culture, the defining principle of mankind provides their valuable identity. Moreover culture is the power that is related of both repulsion and attraction. Samuel P. Huntington therefore says that the "people and countries with different culture are coming apart" and at the same time he insists the fact that "cultural identity is the central factor shaping a country's association and antagonism" to others (125). To find their peace in culture and civilization, people ask such questions: "Who we are?" "Where do we belong?" and "Who is not us?" (126).

People always get meaning in their respective culture. Culture, therefore, is the source of identity; it not only defines them but also provides them a "protective

closure" and thus, people can feel themselves as being secured and meaningful (xii). To differentiate the subject and to establish the identity, there is the role of "identification" in the modern thinking (108). So people seek their identification. Moreover, identity is meaningful at the immediate face to face level where the debate of this or her class, ethnic group, nationality, religion and civilization get an interface to single and collide. As it has already been emphasized, culture is expressed through a variety of ways, and writing is one of them. The rage and the anxiety and love and hate for the past are the source of personal traumatic expression of identity, and the result alienation can be expressed and analyzed in the fictional work as well. Most of 1990-20<sup>th</sup> century novelists face this problem of identity crisis. These writers including Amy Tan expose the 'self' alienated from the mainstream cultural root, and narrate this trauma of dislocated and exiled experience. The characters in their novels themselves in an endless search for belonging and identity, which ends in more subtle frustration, anxiety and confusion. So this kind of problem of identity can be seen in Amy Tan's novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, through the characters of Winnie and Peral.

### **III. Mother-Daughter Bond in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife***

The issues of generational gap and the cultural differences between the mother, Winnie and the daughter, Pearl are the major focus in *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Winnie as a migrant, in the first place she is obviously a displaced character and secondly, she is also facing a cultural difficulty with her own American – born daughter Pearl. Both of them have problem in coping with each other that signifies the cultural difficulty of Chinese-Americans, especially between the first generation migrant and their descendents. Talking about a similar reoccurring theme of mother-daughter bond in Tan's novels, Helen Yglesias says: "The tension that is engendered in any mother-daughter relationship, daughters and their mother" American daughters and their mothers" (2). In the novel Winnie's story is mostly concerned with her past in pre-1949 China and it tends to feature a distinct life, involving rather rigid family, society and World War II experience in Old China. The daughter Pearl's story though does not go back to China like her mother's instead she is born and brought up in America and leading a completely modern life a convenience comparing to her story is still woven with her mother's story. Their lives are in so many ways interconnected to each other though they apparently pretend not having affected much. Therefore, their relationship can be studied as a story of an impact of the generational difference within the context of a migrant family. As shear studying the mother daughter Tan's novels, he remarks:

. . . there is nearly always some tension in the exchange between mother and daughter, between old China and the new American environment. Most often the focus is either on a another, who figured out her world, or on the daughter, who seem caught in a sophisticated rather than answers, puzzling over the realities that seem to be

surrounding them and trying to find their place in what seems an ambivalent world. (194)

In the relationship between Winnie and Pearl, particularly the element like generational difference is much more transparent. Despite Winnie and Pearl being two women of the Same family, they differently stand for the culture of origin "China" and the culture of adopted country "America". So it is basically their migrant background that has made their relation more complicated. Though Winnie is living in America, in many ways her current life also seems largely affected by her past in China. It is explicit throughout the novel, that she is still mentally stuck to China. On the other hand, her daughter, Pearl is American-born and completely like any other typical American, with no insight about her ancestral country, China. Therefore, Winnie and Pearl are grounded in entirely different cultural contexts, with different cultural contexts, with different historical references and subject positions.

Regarding their difference, Yuan Yuan highlights, "As product of different cultures and histories, mothers and daughters abide by different cultural values and possess different modes of interpretation" (293). Winnie, as a migrant has gone through the violent shock of displacement. Regarding the displaced mothers in Tan's novels, Chen describes, "These mothers had left mainland China before 1949 in search of better life, only to find themselves trapped in a land of Diaspora for being different" (113). Indeed Winnie goes through a similar situation. Coming to America though has granted her some high level of security freedom and happy life comparing to her past life in China, culturally she identifies herself as a Chinese rather than an American. However, sadly her own Chinese cultural values have been the source of embarrassment to her American-born daughter and finding own descendants hating her Chinese ways really disappoints her. According to Shear, "the novel's structure in

fact succeeds in manifesting not merely the individual psychic tragedies of those caught up in this history, but the enormous agony of a culture enmeshed in a transforming crisis" (194). For him the novel dramatises "the panorama of a critical transition of cultural values" (194).

Winnie still clings to her old Chinese cultural values and practices though she has been staying in America, involved with the American way of life, but for her, American values and beliefs seem unreasonable. Besides, she also wants her American born daughter, Pearl to have an understanding of her ancestral Chinese values. Instead, Pearl is ignorant about her mother's traditional Chinese ways; she is a typical American in thinking and mannerism. She hates her mother's Chinese ways. Similarly, Winnie has also trouble in accepting Pearl's independent American ways. Therefore, this feeling of cultural disparity triggers the relationship and the identity of both mother and daughter get into crisis.

Here Freudian theory of relation between a mother and a child seem failed. Freud has emphasized the relationship of children with persons who assume primary care to them in most years of the present century and consider these mutual relations as a fundamental basis of emotional and cognitive growth. So there it is supposed to be a good relationship between mother and child but in the case of Winnie and Pearl, they can't get into a good relation. A children loves the most to her mother than other members of the same family, even his father, but in Tan's novel Pearl, having not well understood dislikes her own mother until she knows the reality of her mother.

Describing the element of generational tension between the first migrant and their second generation which Tan's novels are popular for, Shear remarks, "Generally, the daughters tend to perceive cultural blanks, the absence of clear and define answers to the problems of family, where as the mothers tend to fill too much,

often to provide those kinds of cultural answers and principles that seem to empower them to make strong domestic demands on their daughters" (193). The same case is the case between Winnie and Pearl. Shear further says of older Chinese women "perhaps surprisingly, the older women are for the most part not portrayed as pushing their daughters into an outmoded or inappropriate set of values and traditions, but do insist on a basic cultural formulation" (194). As a result, the tension flickers in their relationship. Regarding a similar cultural problem of the first generation migrant, Vijayasree points out "One of the abiding concerns, particularly for the first generation immigrant poised between the inherited 'tradition' they had grown up with and the new culture. They moved into is how to balance their dual affiliation of cultural survival becomes a crucial one in this context" (133).

The cultural clash occurs when two distinct cultures encounter. Pearl who is American born with Chinese legacy, ignores the Chinese cultural traits and follows the American way of life. Winnie on the other hand can't forget her Chinese past and tries to convince her daughter to accept Chinese cultures as well. Since the mother and daughter represent two distinct cultural upbringing, both of them face noncommunicability and untranslatability. Here, these two points illustrate cultural and linguistic barrier between the American-Chinese daughter Pearl and Chinese-American mother Winnie. Pearl sees her mother very conservative superstitious and typical Chinese woman. Winnie too, sees her daughter, Pearl as a sort of completely and absolutely Americanized; with no any respect and interest for the Chinese culture. Pearl and Winnie are immigrants living in American space since the Second World War. The difference between them is because of their cultural upbringing, mother is Chinese born whereas daughter is American born. Pearl, American born is raised in household with Chinese customs and traditions. So she has difficulty to remain on

either the American society or on the side of Chinese cultural heritage. That is why there arises a problem, the problem of identity to Pearl. This problem leads to confrontation with her mother and cultural clash begins within them.

The first part of the novel is narrated by Pearl that shows clash with her mother. This can be shown in the very opening line of the novel, as Pearl narrates: "whenever my mother talks to me, she begins the conversation as if we are already in the middle of the argument" (3). This beginning line of the text shows that how much they are in conflict. Pearl, who get married with American man, Phil is somehow not interested in mother's deeds. The way her mother treats her even makes her husband, Phil angry. The point of bursted anger can be seen as Phil argues: "something I regret that I have married into a Chinese family" (7). According to Pearl's narration, she and her husband are called to participate in Bao-Bao's engagement party in San Francisco. But the conflict arises when they refuse to stay in Winnie's house and choose a hotel instead. Even they try to hide the name of the hotel they will be staying. Because of the cultural differences, Phil; American boy hesitates to introduce under Winnie's Chinese cultural behaviours. The clash among them can be realized as Pearl narrates:

"That is very kind of you, Winnie 'Phil reasoned with my mother over the phone. But we have already made reservations of a hotel.' I listened on the other line, glad that I had suggested he calls and make the excuse. 'What hotel?' My mother asked.

"The Travel Lodge" the Phil lied. We were actually booked at the Hyatt. (10)

Pearl does not wish to be back her mother's house since she got married with the man of different cultural traits. She wanted to distant herself. Mother-daughter relation as pious and harmonious is not working here because of cultural difference. Naturally,

when she is brought in a new world that comprises of different norms and values forces to remain away from her mother's contact, she even does not know any impulses of Chinese cultural customs and traditions. In this regard, she is fully affiliated by American way of life that is individualistic. Not belonging with Chinese cultural traits, naturally distances her from her mother. The following line from Pearl gives the sense of not being attached with her mother's past culture. "I have not stayed here since I have been married" (10).

Similarly, the mutual attachment and understanding of the context between mother and daughter simply collapses. Here, the sense of alienation exists. It means they do not understand each other properly. For Bao-Bao's engagement party, Helen is busy who co-owns with Winnie to run the flower shop. In this moment, Winnie needs helps but does not ask for help. It is revealed when Pearl argues that "my mother did not exactly ask me to help but she did say in a terse voice" (11). Winnie is haunted strongly by sense of loss since she belongs to her Chinese past. On the other hand, Pearl totally ignores her Chinese legacy which ultimately results in confrontation. Winnie opens the flower shop to keep on regulation her Chinese culture. On the contrary, Pearl strongly condemns her mother's professions as she remarks:

My mother claims these banners are the reasons why Ding Ho Flower Shop has been success flowing through its door all these years. By success, I suppose she means that the same people over the last twenty five years keep coming back. Only now its less and less for shy brides and giddy grooms, and more and more for the sick, the old and the dead. (19)

Pearl is greatly attached with American way of life. She knows American culture, norms and values, language other than her Chinese heritage. American modern

culture influences her in a great manner since she is unaware of her Chinese past way of deeds. She doesn't know what is written in banners offered on the funeral procession of Auntie Du in which she is attending. Here, lack of Chinese language that led non communication or gaps occur when they are from two different upbringing. This can be shown as Pearl says: "Her fingers moves slowly down the red banner, as she reads in a formal Chinese I can't understand". And then she translates: "Farewell, Grand Auntie, heaven is lucky. From your favourite niece, Pearl Louie Brandt, and husband" (19-20).

Pearl is proud of when she finds herself in American modern individual culture and she feels very lucky, "by a new standard" (25). The tragic condition Pearl faces in America that she is suffering from the mental sclerosis disease. She keeps secret of that disease from the mother's acknowledgement. This is why, the research proves that American life is very individualistic. She does not wish to share it with her mother. Lack of understanding occurs due to the different cultural upbringing and generational gap as well. The keeping secrecy of disease can be understood when Pearl narrates: "That delicate balance always threatens to go out of Kilter when I see my mother because that's when hits me the hardest: "I have this terrible disease and I've never told her" (25-26). So Pearl charges Winnie as the product of the Chinese patriarchal society. It is believed that Chinese women are completely confined within the periphery of her husband and family what Pearl dislikes. In other words, Chinese way of life is very traditional and conventional based on Confucian male ideology.

Even in Buddhist funeral procession of Auntie Du Peral feels very unfamiliar. She does not like Chinese culture as such. She lacks her knowledge how to perform rituals properly in Chinese cultural engagements due to her lack of understanding and knowledge makes her matter of guilt and shame. This can be clearly observed on

Pearl's expression as: "How should I know?" I whisper back. "I've never been to a Buddhist funeral or whatever this is" (40) as we get her similar response as: "I look round trying to figure out what to do. One by one, we each get up and join the monk and nun, everyone chanting, "Amitaba! Amitaba!" (47). Again she expresses her puzzled condition and lack of knowledge of Chinese cultural rituals. In this regard, she says, "we are circling the coffin 'round and round. I don't know how many times. I feel silly, taking part in a ritual that makes no sense to me" (47). Pearl feels shame and guilt when she is puzzled from the rituals, this can be experienced in her remark: "now it is my turn to bow. And I feel guilty" (47).

Though mother and daughter have same cultural root and heritage, they have the different upbringing they represent. Mother is more Chinese whereas daughter is more American that brings the cultural confrontation that distances each other. Cultural misunderstanding creates hesitation for communication which ultimately leads to problematic and full of turmoils. Pearl easily accepts distance and lapses with her mother, in her expression as: "Mile after mile, all of it familiar, yet not this distance that separate us, me from my mother" (64).

Above all, this sort of cultural confrontation and clash is resolved when Winnie happens to tell their whole Chinese past. This very story telling avoids all kinds of misunderstanding between them to establish Pearl and mother's meaningful reconciled cultural identity.

If there are any groups of individuals having two different cultural background come into contact for a long time, the subsequent changes can take place in the cultural patterns of either one or both groups. In other words, acculturation deserves those tendencies of hybrid identities or reconciled identities. Acculturation is a

process where two distinct cultural traits meet and move towards the cultural integration to establish reconciled identity.

Story telling is an artistic form in which tales are not simply told, but rather retold by the teller to fulfill certain objectives. Among the various functions served by stories, the following are the major ones: to construct cultural identities as expressions of the cultural values, norms, beliefs, traditions of social groups; and as links between past and present, inner and outer, self and other. In this context, they serve not only to perpetuate culture but also to transform. It is the individual story teller who shapes the central cultural ideas in order to achieve a specific goal. The very fact about story telling is that it includes the audience and the listeners bringing them into a single whole. It makes people unite together. Here, the story teller functions as a catalyst and an interaction for the merging of the story reality and objective reality. So they come together to form a unified single whole. As Silko says:

. . . the stories are always bringing us together keeping this whole together, keeping this family together, keeping this clan together. Don't go away, don't isolate yourself, but come here because we have all had these kinds of experiences – this is what the people are saying when they tell stories. And so there is this constant pulling together to resist what seems to be a basic part of human nature: when some violent emotional experience takes place, people get the urge to run off and hide or separate themselves from others. In the story telling, then, we see this process of bringing people together and it works not only in the family level, but also on the level of the individual. (1576)

A great deal of the story is believed to be inside listeners and the story teller's role is to draw the story out of the listeners. This kind of shared experience groups out of a

studying community base. And then the story telling goes on and continues from generation to generation making people aware of their cultural identity. As people do not live forever, their stories live and become passed from one step to the others. They become aware of the historical background of their identity. In this way, story telling plays a great role for making the identities. In this context Silko says that is worth to mention here:

The origin story functions basically as a maker of our identity with the story we know who we are [. . .]. There is no definite pre-set pattern for the way are will here the stories of one's own family, but it is very critical part of one's own family, childhood and it continues throughout one's life. One will hear stories of importance to the family sometimes wonderful stories, stories about the time a maternal uncle got the biggest deer that was never seen and bought back from the mountains. And so one's sense of who the family is and who you are, will then extend from that – "I am from the family of my uncle who brought in this wonderful deer, and it was a wonderful hunt". So one has that sort of building or sense of identity. (1575)

According to Yalam, stories are transformed from childhood to adulthood and this progression reflects the search for cultural identity.

As he remarks:

. . . the stories are transformed into personal fictions in childhood, which are later fashioned adulthood, and family adapted for publication. "This progression seems clearly to reflect the writer's search for cultural identity, as epitomized in the process of by which

she personalizes others' stories and adapts them to her own requirements in the America multicultural context. (7)

There are many ways and techniques of story telling. The oral tradition of African story telling is that where the stories are illuminated by the assumption that the story has greater (true) reality than the objective reality of the world around us. In a real story, the seeming simplicity and reality of objective actions are reinterpreted and woven into a larger scheme through which the actions take on a new and deeper meaning, and their place in mythic pattern emerges. Although the story may be stretched over ions, we can understand it and enter into its reality. Here, the performance of the story becomes the part of the story and though we do not feel the presence of teller the result is the same – a vision of the world as a unity of fiction and reality. This is in effect on self consciousness of oral literature. The story is being performed and created. It is the materials for future legends and archetype for future telling, because, here, the world and the story have been infused together.

People get entertainment from listening the stories and even they are empowered. From the stories, listeners get knowledge by which they are empowered. So stories are surviving in myths and proverbs because of their power to unite people creating feeling of solidarity among them. About the power of story telling, many people have put their opinion in the passage of time since the past to present. Plato had known the power of story telling. Poets are also kind of story teller. They pass the stories to the audience in the form of rhapsodic songs. So, they can incite people because of the enchanting power of the rhapsodies. Because of this fact, he thought to banish them from the republic. When we look at the background of story telling, we find stories of factual-like histories or narratives of real battles, victories, happenings

and so forth or we find stories of fictional-like made up to entertain or instruct the listener appearing and surviving during the course of time.

*The Fables of Aeshop* (620-560 B.C.) and the parables of the *New Testament* highlighted the power of stories and story telling. Similar is the impact of beast fables where animals are found acting like humans in order to teach morals. The religious parable, a short and pithy story with a moral twist, such as the parable of the wise and foolish versions in the *New Testament* also had a great role in shaping the notion of the people to make the power of story telling. These stories, as well as passages of narratives in the *Old Testament* such as the description of the creation of the universe in Genesis or the story of Samson in Judges, are the imposing of power by means of stories for the shaping of identity and way of people there.

In the medieval period in Europe, the art of storytelling became popular. Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* (1387) in which he managed to employ various types of stories to show the greatness of story telling in human life. In this context David Daiches says:

A group linked tales told by different people was not unknown in earlier medieval literature, and scholars have come with various parallels, of which perhaps the closest is the *Novelle* of Giovanni Sercambi, where the setting is also a pilgrimage, though the author himself (one of the pilgrims) tells the tales. It is doubtful whether Chaucer knew Boccaccio's *Decameron*. But Chaucer's work is unique [. . .] the characters are more than of framework: their conduct affects and is affected by the telling of the tales. (106-07)

Anyone, who tells the best story becomes awarded as the important person of the group. It shows the greatness of the power of the story person of the group. It shows

that greatness of the power of story telling, because the best one in telling stories becomes of the day.

In every culture, we find the unmatched power of story teller and stories too. Arabian Nights, a collection of one thousand and one stories, also highlights the power of story telling. In this regard Foucault asserts:

The theme and perfect of Arabian narratives was the ending death; one spoke, telling stories into the early morning in order to forest all death, to postpone the day of reckoning that would silence the narrator Scheherazade's story telling is an effort, renewed each night to keep death outside the circle of life. (196)

For sure, story telling can possess an unmitigating power. It is a way of making oneself exist. It empowers the teller and creates a kind of hegemonic effect to the audience's mind. The art of story telling helps one create a place in the society. Since the art of story telling becomes handy to win the heart of others, story telling can elude death also.

In this regard, in *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) cultural identity is being negotiated in the mother-daughter relationship, as the writer juxtaposes and seeks to reconcile two divergent sets of norms and values and of female models and expectations. The emphasis in this text, therefore, is on the Chinese-American identity. Winnie, the immigrant Chinese mother, is struggling to raise a good 'Chinese' daughter in American location telling the stories. The stories are powerful influence in shaping cultural identity. In this way, Tan conveys the message of the hybrid cultural identity through fragmented stories.

In the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Pearl's mother tells a story of her own mother's nature, behaviours, and relationship with her husband and her position in

family and society as well. Since Winnie finds the gaps (non communication, silence, non understanding, no close relationship etc) with her mother, she goes on telling story about her Chinese past thinking that in naturally returns her into Chinese 'home'. She tells everything that had happened throughout her life when she was in China in a cautionary way, as she tells:

I was born with good luck. But over the years, my luck-just like my prettiness dried out, then caused lines on my face. So I would not forget. I can not explain exactly how this happened, these changes in my life. If I try to say what happened, my story would not follow forward like a river from the beginning to the end, everything connected to the end, everything connected the lake to the sea. If my life had been that way one thing leaning to another, then I could look back and I would know the lessons of my life. (68-69)

What Winnie wanted to make clear about her attitude holding the story is that she is absolutely (completely) dissatisfied with the marginal identity attributed to the women in the Chinese culture. As she tells, Chinese society is based fully on male structure. Male ideology limits the role of women. There is no equality of the males-femals' in the Chinese family and many proverbs are used which express the negative Chinese attitude to daughter. Mother often talks of the role of a mother in Chinese society (especially her condition in her family), which triggers Pearl to search identity. According to Winnie, her mother (Winnie's mother) happened to marry with the person who had already four wives. As Winnie tells about her mother: "back then there was no other reason to marry a second, third, or fourth wife, except to use a woman's prettiness to add to a man's prestige" (120).

In Chinese patriarchal society, multiple marriages by males are easily acceptable and in fact it is the matter of prestige also. Because of this, her mother had to face many difficulties. Similarly, Winnie narrates that her father's wrong and inhuman behaviour with her mother. There was no mutual co-operation. They were even separated. Since then where she was matter of investigation. So Winnie tells about her own mother. "I still feel, I am waiting for her to come back and tell me why it was this way" (102). When she left and disappeared, Winnie "was only six years when she disappeared" (102). In this sense, she was really haunted by the loss of her mother, "I have been thinking about my mother for almost seventy years" (104). So Winnie reconciles the fragmented consciousness and negotiates a hyphenated Chinese American identity.

Not only the story of her mother and father is bitter, but she also tells briefly her own past and she connects her husband in it. Marriage in Winnie's perception is the first aspect to entrap her into social limits by exploiting the individual 'self'. Her traditional marriage with Wen Fu, turns out to be a terrible one, Wen Fu is horrible; physically, mentally and emotionally abusive. So, she attacks this marriage "it was a very bad marriage, I made a mistake" (99). She tells that her marriage is one of the most lamentable obstacles in her life. She confesses to Pearl about her marriage, as a 'mistake' Winnie shows her aggressiveness to her husband, "I did not love Wen Fu, even at the beginning" (168). Winnie experienced much turmoil, strife, and suffering. She clearly goes on telling that "I am glad to face those kinds of dangers rather than by husband" (396). She does not want to be submissive and confined by surrounding him as his 'good wife' rather she attempts to break the limitations of patriarchal marriage and leaves her home and husband in search of her meaningful identity as an autonomous individual. In this way Winnie, tells that she experiences conflict with

her cruel husband. The tone is confessional and reminiscent of oral tradition as Winnie relates events of Chinese past with the wisdom of present America.

As Winnie finishes her story telling, the communication establishes. Non communicability keeps on changing into fruitful communication. Silences and pauses between them almost disappeared. It means mutual co-operation and understanding occurs. Pearl gets the chance to involve in her family past and becomes satisfied and happier being a Chinese American. This can be easily understood when Pearl shares her experiences with her mother: "what a terrible life you have had," I found myself saying. "And you thought you had to keep it a secret from everyone?" she was nodding. "Even me"? I whispered. She nodded again, "and there was no holding back my tears" (509-10).

Pearl time and again pressurize her mother to disclose each and every secrets and at the same time feels lamentation while keeping the history secret. Pearl argues, "Tell me again." I finally said, "why you had to keep it a secret" (510). They frankly share their experiences and sufferings. The more they share their experiences the closer relation gets established. This can be revealed in the following conversation:

"You would know how weak I was. You would think I was a bad mother". "I would not have thought that", I said. "Yes, you would", she insisted. "I did not tell you about my past, and still you thought I was a bad mother. If I had told you then it would be even worse "[. . .]. I never thought you were a bad mother" I said. And then it occurred to me; may be she was not telling me that Wen Fu was my father after all. She had kept it a secret only so I would not think bad things about her. (510-11)

So, the gap that exists between Pearl and her mother, Winnie, which symbolizes the gap between herself and her heritage, also comes to end. What in fact separates two, more than anything else, is that they do not understand each other. Pearl does not want to attend her cousin's engagement party because she has no desire to see her family in the beginning. Her husband is always the only white American person in her family programmes and it appears that she feels out a place, even within her own family ones in a time. She is unfamiliar at the beginning of the novel, with many of the customs of her Chinese heritage and finds herself not understandings to rituals of Auntie Du's Buddhist funeral.

Peral and Winnie, each of them are the products of different cultural upbringing that created misunderstanding between them first. Due to this fact, Pearl had hidden her secret of multiple sclerosis from her mother as Winnie did about her Chinese past. They (Winnie and Pearl) get hurt, no one won but lost, by this gap and by now this very gap is resolved when they keep on disclosing their secrets. No doubt, those stories of Winnie told to Pearl change her easily because she understood her Chinese past and legacies. Her identity unfolds with her mother's identity. Though Winnie's stories are unusual and fragmented or not coherent, but it helps Pearl to understand her family's past: the mere customs, traditions, events, myths etc. the more Winnie narrates Pearl gets closer to Chinese heritage. It is through story telling, Pearl comments back to her mother. Pearl, who is Americanized on the surface but beneath the surface haunted by a sense of being different when story telling reveals the secrecy. After Winnie tells her daughter about her past, Pearl reveals the secret of her own disease. This can be revealed as Pearl replies: "And that's how I knew it was the right moment to tell her. I took a deep breath and said it was causally as I could, "May

be we have something else we can blame on that bad man". And then I told her about my illness" (514).

By the time the wedding of Bao-Bao comes around, mother and daughter know each other better and are able to appreciate each other's positions, ideas and belief better. After then, Helen reveals the planning to a trip to China – a trip that Helen, Pearl and Winnie will together. The plan they have made is not for traveling in fact, but to find a herbal medicine in China that cures Pearl's disease, they believe. In this way maternal relation is formulated and articulated. Laughing and kissing frequently appeared and their relationship enlightened their reconciled condition. Since then there is no more silences and gaps between them. Mother happened to see and realize all her children integrated in single face of Pearl. This is clear as Pearl remarks:

"She touched my cheek, tucked a loose strand of hair around my ear. You looked like Mochou. You looked like Yiku. You looked like Danru, Danru especially. All of them together. All the children I could not keep but could never forget." (511)

Now Pearl joins with Chinese cultural traits as she says "we have the same expressions in Chinese" (513). Pearl comments on her mother's immediate response as: "And then my mother smiles at me like a young school girl" (513).

Finally Pearl shapes her identity by first confronting and then gradually discovering and reconciling her heritage with the American life. Then cultural reconciliation is formed. When the identity is established, Pearl feels the worrying of her mother about her incurable disease. This can be viewed from the following conversation:

' . . . what do you call this disease again? Write it down. Tomorrow I am going to Auntie Du's herb doctor. And after that, I will think a way' [. . .] was going to protest [. . .] but all of a sudden I realized: I did not want her to stop. I was relieved in a strange way. Perhaps relief was not the feeding. Because the pain was there. She was tearing it away – my protective shell, my anger, my deepest fears, my despair. She was putting all this into her own heart, so that I could finally see what was left, Hope. (515)

Moreover, the ending of the novel is the symbolic representation of unification between mother and daughter. In the story of *The Kitchen God's Wife*, it is the Kitchen God who becomes the deity, even though he has been a miserable, overdoer husband and man. Here, it is the woman who is able to take her a woman who is writing history. Story telling is powerful tool because it was the capacity of history and the importance of memory in its realm. A woman has told this story and the woman has listened to this story and a woman has written this story. So it is proved perfectly that the ending is in which women were empowered and got reconciled living in America Basically here, mother and daughter are representation of two different (diverse) China and American cultures. The process of story telling of mother to her daughter (Pearl) makes understood her mother and her cultural heritage. Eventually mother succeeds to bring her daughter back to 'Old home', means Pearl doesn't quit (leave) the American Culture but at least she understood her Chinese heritage in American context and got reconciled.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This research analyzes Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* as the case study of Chinese-Americans, where the themes of cultural difference, mother-daughter clash and generational tension seem dominant. Exploring the novel through the historical perspective, the research also focuses the cultural context of Chinese-Americans. In the cultural study the characterization of Pearl and Winnie holds a major attention because their troubled relation is the central theme of the novel.

In the United States of America, the search for identity has been a recurrent notion as a whole. The cultural revolution of the sixties both weakened the hegemony of the 'dominant' Euro-American culture and strengthens various structures. On the other hand, there was a tendency to question and even deny the traditional values, norms and beliefs that has been laid the foundation of American cultural identity. In the same way, there was a powerful civil rights movement which drew attention to the situation of the 'other' Americans whose life experiences and histories diverged from these norms. Such developments entailed shift in the rhetoric from the metaphor of the 'melting pot' to the multicultural metaphor of 'salad bowl'. In so called marginal groups, the quest for cultural identity which often took the form of rejection of the dominant culture, accompanied by the revival or reconstruction of stories and of communal history.

In the novel, Amy Tan deals mostly with the issues that arise out of the immigrants' experiences and cultural gaps between immigrants and their children. The text, thus, is an account of cultural encounter, which depicts the trials and tribulations of a female Chinese-American upbringing in California, of America. No doubt, it is also a demonstration of the efforts of Chinese American to find a middle ground between the Chinese and American beliefs as well as way of life. In other words, it

articulates the dual consciousness emerged from the immigrant experience and yet represents a desire for integration between these two cultural heritages. So, this work is very much indebted about the issues that arises out of immigrants' experiences and misunderstanding between immigrants and their children due to the cultural gaps and finally it deals with reconciliation between these two cultures.

In this regard, Pearl, a female narrator is of Chinese cultural background experiences a problematic life in American culture. Pearl, American born is raised in a household with Chinese customs and traditions. But she has difficulty to remain on either the American society fully dominated by modern western culture or in the side of Chinese cultural heritage. Outside the home she feels close attachment or attraction with American way of life which is guided by individualism and self centeredness. After realizing the bitter condition of non-communication and misunderstanding, Winnie tells her stories which ultimately help to bind them. Winnie, her mother recalls their Chinese past that discloses the secrets supposed to be mysterious for Pearl. What is particularly interesting about Winnie's attitude to an handling of stories is, in fact, that she obviously dissatisfied the marginal identity attributed to the woman in the Chinese culture. The main concern of the story telling is to establish cultural identities as expression of the cultural values, norms and beliefs and traditions of the social groups and as links between past and present, inner or outer, self and other etc. In this context, they serve not only to perpetuate culture but also to transform it since it is the individual story teller who shapes the central cultural ideas in order to achieve a specific goal. The very fact about story telling is that it includes the audience and the listeners bringing them into a single whole. The act of story telling creates a reality that merges with the non-story reality. It forces the people unite together, especially Pearl and Winnie's emotional bonding. Here, the story teller functions as a

catalyst and an interaction for the merger of story reality and objective reality. So they come together to form a unity.

In this context, interaction or interrelationship plays a particularly prominent role in search of identity. Stories serve as the pivotal point around which both individual and community quests revolve. Winnie, therefore, takes a way to realistically bridge two cultures: Chinese and American and their separate versions of reality. She attempts to assimilate her daughter with Chinese past. Pearl who once remains in distance from her family entangles with several mysterious stories. She realizes the importance of cultural heritage that immediately binds her with her mother. The cultural differences that exist between them finally collapse and ultimately identity and mutual understanding get established. So in the end of the novel Tan once again makes the two characters possibility binding together at a time.

## Works Cited

- Adams, Bella. "Repressing History in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*." MELUS 28.2 (2000): 9-30.
- Applebaum, Richard P. and William J. Chamblis. *Sociology*. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1995.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Balibar, Etienne. "Culture and Identity." *Identify in Question*. Ed. John Rajchman. New York: Routledge, 1995: 173-196.
- Caesar, Judith. "Patriarchy, Imperialism, and Knowledge in *The Kitchen God's Wife*." *North Dakota Quarterly* 62.4 (14994-5): 164-175.
- Chang, Iris. *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- Chau, C.L. Book Review. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Magil Book Review, 1991.
- Chen, Xiaomei. "Reading Mother's Tale-Reconstructing Women's Space in Amy Tan and Zhang Jie Chinese Literature: Essay, Articles, Reviews." CLEAR 16 (1994): 111-132.
- Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vol.1. New Delhi: Allied, 1960.
- Foucault, Michael. "Truth and Power." *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Ed. Hazard Adams. New York: Harcourt, 1962: 1135-1145.
- Gramsci, Antonia. *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*. Ed. And Trans. Question Haore and Geogffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International, 1971.

- Hall, Stuart "Cultural Identify and Diaspor." *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. Delhi: OUP, 1997: 110-21.
- Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilization and the Remarking of the World Order*. New York: Viking, 1995.
- Riggs, Thomas. *Reference Guide to American Literature*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. United Status: St. James Press, 2000.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Granta Books, 1992.
- Seaman Donna. Book Review. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. *American Libraries Journal* July/Aug 22.7, 1991: 688.
- Shapiro, Laura. "From China, with Love: *The Kitchen God's Wife*." *Newsweek*. 117.25, 1991: 663-664. silko, Leslie Marmon. *Story Teller*. New York: Arcade, 1981.
- Taylor, E.B. *Primitive Culture*. London: J. Murray, 1971.
- Wanger, Tamara S. "A Barrage of Ethnic Comparison: Occidental Stereotypes in Amy Tan's Novels". *Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. 45. 4, 2004: 435-46.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture*. London: OUP, 1981.
- Yalam, Marilyn. *Maternity, Mortality and Literature of Madness*. University Park Peen State UP, 1985.
- Yuan, Yuan. "The Semiotics of China Narratives in the Contexts of Kingston and Tan". *Criticism* 40.3, 1999: 292-303.