

Chapter I: Introduction

Tan and her Literary Features

Amy Tan was born in 1952 in Oakland California to two Chinese immigrant parents and was the middle child of three siblings. Appropriately, the Chinese name her parents gave her was "An-mei," which means, "blessing from America." It becomes evident, after reading Tan's novels, especially *The Kitchen God's Wife*, that her family history is highly influential to her writing. Her father John Tan, for example, worked for the U.S. Information Service during World War II, much like it is rumored that the character of Jimmy Louie in the novel was an American Spy. Also, both Amy Tan's father and the character of Jimmy Louie were ministers in the Chinese Baptist Church. The most autobiographical element in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, however, is the character and story of Winnie Louie, who is very much modeled after Tan's own mother, Daisy Tan. Daisy, by the time moved to the United States in 1949, and faced many problems just as Winnie who suffered before reaching America. Both Daisy and Winnie are motherless children involve in intensely abusive traditional marriages, and both lose children of their own. Furthermore, there are the facts of Tan's own life, growing up as an American in a Chinese home, that provides an important background for the novel.

Tan worked a number of odd jobs through college and graduate school, worked as a Language Development Consultant and, later still, became successful as a freelance business writer. Tan was, however, unfulfilled and eventually left her fast-paced world of business writing and became a full-time novelist. In 1986, Tan's mother was hospitalized, which had a great affect on Tan. What had seemed to be a heart attack was really just angina, but it made Tan realize that she had not taken the time to listen to her mother's

story. This was, therefore, a turning point in her life. It was what gave her the desire to know her mother better, and it is what, ultimately, along with a trip to China, helped in the creation of her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, and her second novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) which depicts the strained and complicated but finally settled relationship between a mother and her daughter. Her third novel *The Hundred Secret Sense* (1995) is centered on the sisterhood relationship between two half sisters Kwan and Olivia. Then Tan published her fifth novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (1999) which is a sort of biography of her mother. Thus, as an American novelist of Chinese descent, she takes much interest on the theme of the life stories of Chinese women who are somehow affected by the fact of their cultural displacement and dislocation. In this regard, some critics have interpreted the importance of the novel in terms of its historicity. Yuan Yuan argues that the novel is a China narrative which recounts the Japanese invasion with personal touch and minuteness:

The China narrative is based on Winnie's constant painful experiences in China. In fact the pain and suffering that are central to Winnie's recollection invite repression, rather than recall. Her China narrative is subject to constant postponement and erasure to conceal the unspeakable experience and repressed memory. Winnie's experience of china is transfigured into a discourse of repression and recollection of China experiences is translated into a loss narrative. (292)

Thus, as Yuan says, both the recollection of her personal suffering at the hands of her brutal first husband, and the national suffering of China by the Japanese invasion form the basic narrative of the novel, thereby rendering it a proper China narrative. By China

narrative, in this context, is meant the story of national suffering China underwent during the World War II because of the Japanese attack. The suffering of China at national political level is identical to the suffering Chinese women have to put up with at the hands of the Chinese patriarchy at the domestic level.

The Kitchen God's Wife is the study of history as claimed by Bella Adams. She comments:

Specifically the section narrated by Winnie Louie (known as Jiang Welli), this novel is valuable because in representing a particular period of Chinese history, namely Japan's occupation of China during the 1930s and 1940s as well as the rape of Nanking. (9)

The very wording here, rape, is suggestive of the forced dominion a male has over a female. This supports the contention that there is a defensible similarity between the practice of imperialism, which is political rape, and patriarchy.

Michelle Nealy argues that the novel is about the secret relationship of mother and daughter. She says:

One family and two big secrets shared between a mother and daughter. Both secrets will manage to revise the family's past and future. As the mother is forced by Helen, another relative, to tell her daughter about her life story of growing up in China against the back drop of World War II the American born daughter Pearl must reflect on her own line and behaviour. (22)

In her book *A Chinese Banquet of Secrets*, Helen Zia comments that, "Tan juxtaposes the China-born mother's inner turmoil with U. S. born daughter's trepidation.

The cultural distance between mother and daughter contribute to fears they have for each other". (76)

In this way, the critics have studied this text from various perspectives. However, the present study seeks to prove that Winnie revolts against the Chinese patriarchy by getting herself assimilated into the American culture. She has done that by divorcing from her first husband, suffering a year's jail term and finally getting to America to be united with her lover husband.

In Amy Tan's novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the author weaves Chinese mythology and beliefs through a woman's struggle to explain and come to terms with her harrowing past, to her American daughter, Pearl. Aside from the horror invoked by Winnie's tale of her life in Pre-Communist/Feudal China, the thing that struck me the most about this book was how often the themes of luck and fate crop up in the story. Her characters seem to believe that their lives are controlled more by luck/fate than by their own will. While the similarities between the two books do exist, they are very different stories dealing with two cultures far removed from each other in location, beliefs and ways of life. In her novels, the ideas of mythology, luck and fate pertain to a great deal.

As a cursory reading of the novel unravels, Winnie is a widow, presently settling in San Francisco where there is a small flower shop run jointly with her friend Helen. She has a daughter named Pearl who is married to a non-Chinese husband and they have two daughters at their home in San Jose. The family drama moves forward with the impetus derived from the fact that Winnie and her daughter Pearl have trouble in coming in term to each other. This begins since the very childhood of Pearl who sees her mother as very conservative, superstitious even who typifies an average Chinese women and

mother. The same problem of failing to understand her daughter occurs to Winnie as well. The mother sees her daughter as too much Americanized, with little interest in and reverence for the Chinese way of life, culture and tradition. This failure to connect with each other, the two female persons are invariably drawn off from each other towards an abyssal pit of misunderstanding and their mutual relationship becomes more and more strained with the passage of time. It is a general maxim that time removes wounds and heals them, but in the case of the women of Chinese descent, nothing significant occurs in the direction of ameliorating their relationship until it becomes almost too late to live their life freely in the company of each other. The beginning of the novel captures this very theme.

Not only do we go beyond a tale that deifies the male figure, but also we end up with a resuscitated myth about Winnie as a survivor of gender inequities in an unprecedented gesture cognizant of her success as "the mother of an accomplished daughter, and the grand-mother of two American children" (Huntley 85). As a result of this, staying enclosed within the superficial limitations of the exotic culinary flavour in the Chinese myth is likely to overlook Tan's feminist subversive message.

The mother-daughter relationship is another perennial theme to be found in Tan's masterpieces, not least in *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Mother and daughter share the kitchen, and within that space, they also share their stories and histories, and aspirations. Embedded with a culinary title, the aforementioned novel stands as an absorbing narrative of Winnie Louie's life which she offers as a gift to her daughter, Pearl. Blaming all the negative aspects of Confucianism, Winnie allows her daughter into her past life and achieves a sense of reconciliation with herself in a retrospective demonstration of her

blossoming feminist consciousness. Winnie re-emerges with a sensibility wherein the figure of the absent mother is strikingly painful and irreplaceable. In her connection to her daughter, Winnie sounds endlessly after a quest for motherly nurture and care, occasioning the growth of a connection recently founded on compassion, sympathy and understanding and achieved mainly through food metaphors.

Nobody fails to notice the culinary beginning and closure of *The Kitchen God's Wife*. The latter instills feeding with a communicative load whereby the culinary is concomitant with the retrieval of women's relationships from oblivion. In fact, Tan's second text is replete with food feasts with various secrets in between. In a moment that goes far beyond inculcating an ornamental grotesque material, Winnie treats Pearl to a Chinese soup before divulging the hidden rape. She asks Pearl to finish a bowl of hot noodles that she has just prepared; plainly putting in her hopes that Pearl captures the love, the truce, the affection behind it, expecting that "she would remember how soothing my soup made her feel" (101). This specific invitation encompasses a mother seeking her daughter's alliance, the necessary psychological support, compassion and sympathy that Pearl is summoned to hold for a survivor of violation.

Another feature of Tan's writing is the connectivity of different countries and cultures in modern times. Her characters are led into escaping their own culture and community to get a new life and meaning of life. Though Winnie is married, yet it is actually Jimmy, her second husband, who really loves her and does everything possible to make her happy. He is a jovial, friendly and decent Chinese American. When Winnie first meets him during the war time, he is working for the United States Information

Service as a translator for American volunteers. Then, for a long time they do not meet, and only after her marriage starts to deteriorate, she meets him in the streets of Shanghai. She has lost all the three babies, and her husband is treating her badly. Jimmy wants to rescue her from this miserable plight and offers his helping hands. She also understands that her life with Win Fu is not going successful; so they both fly from China to America. But before that Winnie is raped by the irate Win Fu, her first husband. There in the new land, she gives birth to Pearl as the daughter of Jimmy but she is actually fathered by Win Fu. Winnie, thus, has to come to America not because she does not love her motherland but because she has to flee from the monster of her first husband. Going to America is her only possible alternative. Even then, she is every inch a Chinese in her feelings, mannerism and dress up. She knows it well that her daughter takes her to be an eccentric person because of this all.

Imperialism, international politics and power play also become subject of interest for Tan's great novels. As shown in the novel under study in this thesis, eventually Pearl comes to know story of her mother's suffering in China, and the suffering of the Chinese nation at the hands of the Japanese invading army. This disclosure opens up the eyes of the daughter so that she can show her mother had come through difficult times in life. Pearl realizes how she has ever been judgmental towards her mother without understanding the real story. Her mistake is in inability to see the story and history her mother has been living with throughout all these years in America as an immigrant. After this the mother and daughter become more intimate and respectful of each other. Thus the generational and cultural gap between them is filled with understanding and love. Thus

Tan seems to be addressing the issues of mother daughter relationship, justice, cross-culturalism, politics, revising history etc.

The work makes an exhaustive study of the text that is the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*. As regards the theoretical tools with which to analyze the texts the theories of feminism and patriarchal discourses is discussed at some detail in the following chapters. The first chapter sets the hypothesis of the thesis with a view to addressing the problem as found in the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*. It also contains a general introduction to the author and the novel under scrutiny against the backdrop of the history of feminism and patriarchy. The second chapter elaborates on the working tool which is employed to scrutinize the text. The principal theoretical tool is the feminist theory of discourse which shows how the females are suffered by patriarchy. The concept of ethnic feminism as a discourse that works as a formative force combining cultural norms and values will be discussed here at some length. The third chapter presents a detailed textual analysis with textual citations so as to show how the novel documents numerous instances of Chinese patriarchy inherently functions upon the character's world. Here, it is proved that how Winnie revolts against Chinese patriarchy by getting herself assimilated into the mainstream American milieu. The final chapter concludes the thesis with a brief recounting observation of the work affirming that the hypothesis projected at the beginning of the paper remains consistent with and supported by the consequent chapters.

Chapter II: Feminism

Origin and Development of Feminism

Feminism is a social theory and a political movement primarily informed and fuelled by the experience of women. Inaugurated by such critical minds as Mary Wollstonecraft and Germaine Nicole de Sainte Beauve, this movement is later strengthened by Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir in the twentieth century. As Lois Tyson puts:

Broadly defined, feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women. (85)

Simply to put, feminism can be understood as a doctrine which advocates equal rights and dignity for women. Feminism acquires a more or less concrete set of beliefs in the nineteenth century articulating the thesis that women are inherently equal to men in every conceivable way.

Feminist criticism becomes a dominant force in Western literary studies in the late 1970s, when feminist theory is applied to linguistic and literary matters. Since the early 1980s, feminist literary criticism has developed and diversified in a number of ways and is now characterized by a global perspective. French feminist criticism garners much of its inspiration from Simone de Beauvoir's seminal book, *Lé Deuxième Sexe* (1949; *The Second Sex*). Beauvoir argues that associating men with humanity more generally (as many cultures do) relegates women to an inferior position in society. Subsequent French feminist critics writing during the 1970s acknowledges Beauvoir's critique but focus on language as a tool of male domination, analyzing the ways in which it represents the world from the male point of view and arguing for the development of a feminine

language and writing.

Although interested in the subject of feminine language and writing, North American feminist critics of the 1970s and early 1980s begin by analyzing literary texts—not by abstractly discussing language—via close textual reading and historical scholarship. One group, like Virginia Woolf, practices feminist critique, examining how women characters are portrayed, exposing the patriarchal ideology implicit in the so-called classics, and demonstrating that attitudes and traditions reinforcing systematic masculine dominance are inscribed in the literary canon. Other group, namely Elaine Showalter and Susan Gubar, practices what comes to be called gynocriticism, studying writings by women and examining the female literary tradition to find out how women writers across the ages have perceived themselves and imagined reality.

While it gradually becomes customary to refer to an Anglo-American tradition of feminist criticism, British feminist critics of the 1970s and early 1980s objects to the tendency of some North American critics to find universal or essential feminine attributes, arguing that differences of race, class, and culture gives rise to crucial differences among women across space and time. British feminist critics regard their own critical practice as more political than that of North American feminists, emphasizing an engagement with historical process in order to promote social change.

By the early 1990s, the French, American, and British approaches have so thoroughly critiqued, influenced, and assimilated one another that nationality no longer automatically signals a practitioner's approach. Today's critics seldom focus on woman as a relatively monolithic category; rather, they view women as members of different societies with different concerns. As the critic Carolyn Denard points out, women of

color and multiple cultural background "advocate what may be called ethnic cultural feminism" (172) which is "concerned more with the particular female cultural values of their own ethnic group rather than with those of women in general" (171). Feminists of color, Third World (preferably called postcolonial) feminists, and lesbian feminists have stressed that women are not defined solely by the fact that they are female; other attributes –such as religion, class, and sexual orientation etc – are also important.

Many commentators have argued that feminist criticism is by definition gender criticism because of its focus on the feminine gender. But the relationship between feminist and gender criticism is, in fact, complex; the two approaches are certainly not polar opposites but, rather, exist along a continuum of attitudes toward sex, sexuality, gender, and language.

As a concerted social and political movement that becomes wide-reaching, feminism got momentum in the twentieth century. The aim of this movement can be designed as spiritual as it seeks to establish a human society based on the mutual understanding and respect between the two sexes. *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines feminism in two important senses:

Feminism is (a) arrange of contemporary theoretical perspectives (political, sociological, legal, psychoanalytic, literary, philosophical) in which women's experiences are examined in relation to actual or perceived differences between the power and status of men and women; (b) a social justice movement in which issues of particular importance for women are analyzed, understood, and addressed from feminist perspectives. (201)

Today, the multiplicity of definitions of this movement makes it difficult to provide an all-inclusive definition. But a shared endeavor all feminist theories and theorists make is to question why women have been consigned to a subservient status in relation to men. They explain the social system controlled and constructed by men, is the cause behind women's subordination. Feminism also studies how women's lives have changed throughout history. All human cultures seem to encourage the development of gender roles, through literature, costume and song. Some examples of this might include the epics of Homer, the King Arthur tales in English, which valorize the qualities of bravery, adventure and chivalry as exclusively male ones.

For a long time since the written history of humanity begins, all literatures on women used to present women in a demeaning way. It was only in the seventeenth century that the consciousness that women are equal to men emerged. Before that, the position of women as equal to men in all the consequential and vital aspects of life is outright denied. Since almost all literatures are written by men, women are depicted as being inferior to men in terms of physical strength, mental capability, and spiritual quest. Women are limited to the role of taking care of kitchen, children and church (religion).

Of course, women are adored for their outward or physical beauty. That shallow adoration did not earn women any true respect from the males. Relegated to a secondary status, the aspiration and dreams of half of the world populace finds no recognition in the annals of human history which is exclusively andocentric. Little literature created by women has been found. In the performance art such as dramas of those times male actors play the part of the women. This is the universal plight of the womankind throughout the world. As consequence, women everywhere are rendered mute and tolerant, subservient

and secondary. For all that, women are not going to tolerate the injustice for ever. In fact, there are occasional voices against male domination of women. As Patricia Madoo Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantly in their book *The Women Founders: Sociology and Social Theory, 1830 to 1930* (1998) contend “until the late 1700s feminist writing survives as a thin but persistent trickle of protest” (488).

As is inevitable for their liberation from the century long suppression, females finally begins to raise strong and organized voice suspecting and arguing against all sorts of social constructs and myths that consigns them to a lower-than-human status. The historical movement in the seventeenth Europe called Renaissance paves the way for the Age of Reason or The Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. The philosophy of utilitarianism and individualism, championed by minds such Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill respectively, underlines the importance each individual and their aspirations. This inspired the women to claim recognition of themselves, of their individuality. This awareness further prompts them to explore their position in the society. No sooner had they begun to explore this issue and found themselves oppressed by men, “feminist writing has become a growing tide of critical work” (Lengermann and Brantley 488). There are several women and even some men who are instrumental to introducing feminism which gains strength as a socio-political movement in time. Some of them are briefly introduced in what follows below.

The publication of Mary Wollstonecraft’s “Vindication of the Rights of Women” in 1792 is regarded as the groundbreaking event in the history of feminism. The book presents the portrayal of women in the world of literature authored by men of different times. The central contention of the book is that human mind is impressionable and that

women have been forced into believing in their own inferiority and the superiority of men by the representations in literatures and the constant preaching of parents in life.

Specially, the sentimental novels which were in vogue at that times become the butt of Wollstonecraft's attack for spreading pernicious influence on the mentality of the young women. Such sentimental novels, she writes, inspired women to be domiciled, and emotionally blackmailed women to pay more attention to their physical beauty rather than to their spiritual and intellectual growth:

Everything they see or hear serves to fix impressions, calls forth emotions, and associates, ideas that give a sexual character to their mind. False notions of beauty and delicacy stop the growth of their limbs and produce a sickly soreness, rather than delicacy of organs. . . . This cruel association of ideas, which everything conspires to twist into all their habits of thinking (395-6)

Wollstonecraft is also critical of the religion that put women under the power of men. As her writings point out, women in those times are not free at all regarding the choice of their intellectual exercise, choice of husbands and career in life. They are expected to act and live according to the fancy of the men. As a result, it is not surprising that women have no sense of public responsibility, moral height or intellectual depth. As Wollstonecraft further clarifies, women are not allowed to participate in any meaningful social activity. Their only utility to society is to perform the domestic duty of pleasing and holding the family of their men together. As Wollstonecraft writes, "The mighty business of female life is to please" (398). Though they may seem ordinary today, Wollstonecraft's ideas are quite novel in her own times. Her writings set up the way

women should concentrate for their emancipation from the domestic and traditional roles assigned them by the patriarchy.

The next important feminist is Harriet Martineau from America. She emerged as one of the earlier liberal feminist with her demand that women be given the opportunity of education the right to vote for or get elected. Her earlier publications such as *Society in America* (1836) and *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838) were works of sociological interest. As Lengermann and Brantley write of her in the book. *The Women Founders: Sociology and Social Theory, 1830 to 1930*:

Martineau sought to create a science of society that would be systematic, grounded on empirical observation, and accessible to general, readership, enabling people to make personal and political decisions guided by a scientific understanding of the principles governing social life. (31)

Martineau advocates for the due minimum political right of the women—the right to vote. She noted in *Society in America* that the four social conditions—slavery, political non-existence of women, among others—were in direct contradiction to one of the founding principles of the American nation, that all are equal in the eyes of God and government. In the America of 1830s, all were not equal excepting the adult, white, land-owning males. Thus, her demand for voting right for women earned her the designation of a liberal feminist.

John Stuart Mill, though a male, advocates that women should be empowered for the development of a society. In his book *The Subjugation of Women* he emphasizes the importance of education for the advancement of a society. Mill's alignment with the feminist cause is important, for it is evident that women's participation only is not

sufficient for bringing about an attitudinal change in the society about women. After being elected as a member of parliament in the 1860s, Mill supported women's suffrage movement, the welfare of the peasants and workers, and the land reform in Ireland. He unequivocally announces that there should be equality of married persons in the eyes of law, for a just society can be founded only among people of equal rights and dignity. For these ideas, he is recognized as one of the forerunning liberal feminists from the male side.

Patriarchy: Male-centered Worldview

A society can be called patriarchal to the extent it valorizes male values at the cost of female ones and helps perpetuate the domination of women at the hands of men.

Patriarchy, understood in its literal sense, means the rule of the father. This sociological and anthropological meaning retains its relevance in the political and philosophical movement of feminism too. But feminist would like to contend that patriarchy would refer not simply to a society where men hold power, but rather to a society ruled by a certain kind of men wielding a certain kind of power. And such a society reflects the deep-rooted values of traditional male ideal. In this sense, patriarchy denotes a culture whose central and driving ethos is an embodiment of male or rather masculist ideals and practices conforming to those ideals. As Lois Tyson clearly outlines, feminists have seen through the machinations of patriarchy:

The belief that men are superior to women has been used, feminists have observed, to justify and maintain the mal monopoly of position of economic, political and economic power, in other words, to keep women powerless by denying them the educational and occupational means of

acquiring economic, political, and social power. That is, the inferior position long occupied by women in patriarchal society has been culturally, not biologically, produced. (86)

Patriarchy has determined to a considerable and virtually indelible extent the nature and quality of human societies across the world irrespective of time and space, the values and priorities, and the place and image of women within the societies, and the relation between the sexes. Feminism, therefore, as socio-political movement which aspires to enhancing healthy and just relations between the two sexes, has to expose how masculist or male-centered ideals have been dehumanizing, subordinating women on the basis of grossly unfounded myths and norms.

Patriarchy is in part the mistaking of male perspectives, beliefs, attitudes, standards and values and perceptions for all human perceptions. Patriarchy has been the root cause behind women's social and intellectual disenfranchisement. And the major problem with this is that patriarchy is unconsciously embedded even in the female psyche. As Sheila Ruth writes in *Issues in Feminism: A First Course in Women's Studies*, the goals of feminism acquire the status of a supremely noble ideology, a sort of spiritual dignity. As she records the goals of feminism are: to change women's sense of themselves; to change women's aspirations, based on an increased sense of worth and rights, their presence in the world; to alter the relations between women and men, to create true friendship and respect between the sexes in place of "the war between the sexes" (165); to give all people, women and men, a renewed sense of human worth, to restore to the center of human endeavors a love for beauty, kindness, justice, and quality in living; to reaffirm in society the quest for harmony, peace, and humane compassion.

Gender and Sex

Gender, viewed from feministic perspective, is used for dominating women. Gender is nothing more than the division of sexuality and men's domination over women. Sexuality constitutes gender, not vice versa. Sex is the biological constitution as male or female; and gender is the cultural programming as feminine or masculine. Meaning, men are not born masculine, nor are women born feminine. Rather they are the gender categories constructed by society. This view of gender is social constructionism.

In patriarchal mode of society all power is exclusive to men. If women exercise any power emanating from their sexuality, that power is precarious at the best, always at the mercy of men. This power is a disadvantaged privilege which ultimately cripples the human personality in women. To elucidate by example, a woman is more adept at looking after a baby or a sick person. This very skill renders her a mere caretaker—either as mother or wet mother, or as a nurse. She is deprived of the right to act like a father or a doctor. As Catherine Mackinnon says:

Sexuality, then, is a form of power. Gender, as socially constructed embodies it, not the reverse. Women and men are divided by gender made into the sexes, as we know them, by the social requirements of heterosexuality, which institutionalize male sexual dominance and female sexual submission. If this is true, sexuality is linchpin of gender inequality. (qtd. in Freedman 60)

In heterosexuality, men occupy the first or upper position. Lesbianism, on the other hand, provides a space for female love for female. In the postmodern era, it is argued that

lesbianism does not mean women are prone to having sexual relation with women, but rather women are declined to having sex with men. As Freedman argues, “the very essence, definition and nature of heterosexuality is men first” (61). Heterosexuality reinforced men’s supremacy over women. Women who had sex with men were supposed to be surrendering themselves to the dominance of men.

Gender is a socially constructed concept based on the biological difference, that is, sex, between male and female. While sex is determined and indisputably established by nature at the time of one’s birth, gender is merely an effect of conferring certain stereotypical roles and values to the sex. By this boys are supposed to be strong, daring and daring whereas girls are supposed to be weak, docile and submissive. Actually, there is no such relation between sex and the nature of an individual, but certain roles are imposed upon them by society. So they are social constructs.

The relation between sex and gender is burdened with confusion and even a degree of complexity. One line of argument goes that sexual characteristics are fixed as per the law of nature and therefore account for gender role arrangements. That is, since men and women are differently endowed by nature, their duties, and capacities also differ. But others, especially the ones armed with the latest theories of nature /nurture controversy deny such simplistic differentiation between the two. Gender is not the same as sex, which means the biological fact, they argue; it is composed of a set of socially defined character traits. For example, a man is supposed to be self-assertive, calm, rational and protective of the weaker sex. Contrarily, a woman is supposed to be soft, docile, seeking to please her male relatives, trying to maintain harmony at the cost of her rights and identity. But the question is: are such expectations and concepts not created by

men and therefore artificial? The critical approach known as feminism says it is so. The patriarchal society, dominated by male values as universal values, constructs such gender roles. Women are made weak by many things as a foremost feminist critic Sheila Ruth's observation makes it clear how women are rendered weak in character and self-assertion:

Many factors in the environment conspire to impede women's competence and accomplishments in many areas—hostile or deprecating attitudes of incumbent men, lack of support and assistance from all quarters, dual and/or incompatible professional and nonprofessional functions, pervasiveness of the male (alien, inhospitable) ambience, and socialization that erodes confidence and self-assertion. Rather than being inferior, women are hampered in developing competence in the most profound ways. (160)

Given these odds against their success in life, it is hardly surprising that so few women come to be counted as successful personages in life. These accounts for the relatively backward position women occupy in every public domain in comparison to men. How can one expect women to be somebody with their distinct mark in a field when what the society and family confines the definition of good women to those who are beautiful and attractive, fragile, domestic and self-effacing—that is, ready to renounce themselves for the integrity of their family and the honor of their husbands? The masculist images of women and the roles that these images support are constructed so as to create a situation many ways very convenient for men. Women are expected to help and serve men physically, taking care of their homes, property, clothing, or persons; economically, doing numerous household chores for which women are paid so little or not paid at all;

sexually, as wives, mistresses, or prostitutes who satiate men's sexual needs; and reproductively, assuring men of their family line, the continuity of dynasty. The image of woman as man's complement offers an extremely effective support mechanism for the masculist self-image: the softer, weaker, and more dependent the woman is, the stronger and more powerful the man appears; the more servant the woman, the more masters the man.

Thus, female members of the society, because of their sex, are deprived of the many privileges enjoyed by the male ones. Women are divested of power, be it economic, political, or any other. This state of affair is reflected in literature too. In portraying female characters, writers whether knowingly or unknowingly happen to show the women as weak, powerless, in need of the support and guidance of men.

Patriarchy and Imperialism

The critic Adams has drawn an interesting and theoretically convincing parallelism between the Chinese patriarchy on the one hand and the Japanese imperialism on the other. She writes that the novel "represents both the rape of Nanking and the rape of Winnie, drawing attention to the similarities between the Japanese military and a Chinese husband" (16). There is a similarity between imperial attacks on a nation and the male domination over women. Both try to control the other by force. In this context, the Japanese attack on China can be seen as a male chauvinistic domination over female. A brief look into the Sino-Japanese tension is therefore presented here.

A case in point, both the Japanese military and the Chinese husband are hell-bent upon proving their superiority by brute physical force; neither of them atones for their crimes. Instead, and shamelessly, both pose themselves as the victim, as it is pointed by

Scarlet Cheng: “With respect to *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, the patriarchal institutions of marriage and of law operate to ensure that Wen Fu’s version of things stands” (21). In the court, the way Win Fu vindicates his reasons for separating from his wife, Winnie, are reminiscent of any futile illogical argument lodged by the imperial powers that they had to occupy the other nations because they could not rule and control themselves. Further Cheng argues, “She had given up a respectable life, turned her ban on her father; let her own son die – all because she was crazy for American sex” (478). And this specious logic of an irresponsible and bullying husband who knew nothing so much as a whit about the personal dignity of the other sex, gets sanctioned by the court, which, it must not be forgotten, consists of male members in the jury bench.

As Adams has so succinctly put it, “Not only does Wen Fu determine Winnie’s bodily feelings and functions through physical manipulation, he also manages the sign systems, assisted by the powerful institutions such as the law and the media, in order to represent himself as violated by the loss of his son, and property” (20). In the course of the case trial, the institutions including the court, which are patriarchal for the simple reason that they are occupied by male member exclusively, turn supportive of Wen Fu’s cooked up stories. Thus the case of Winnie goes unjustly and lopsidedly decided.

One can see the similarity between the plight of Chinese woman in a patriarchal society on the one hand, and the suffering of China as a nation under Japanese imperialism. In the first case, it is the rule of men, patriarchy which dominates the Chinese women. In the second, it is the Japan’s imperial power, made up of males of course, which dominates the Chinese people. Thus, two different powers assume the position of predators, and the Chinese women become doubly victimized. Thus there is

ground for comparison between the two forces, though, in front of Japanese imperial power, Chinese patriarchy too was crushed to a great extent. The problems specific to Chinese women under dual pressures of the Chinese patriarchy and the Japanese imperialism can be addressed with the insights of ethnic feminism. Also, Winnie's problem in adjusting in America arises due to her ethnic difference there.

Chapter III: Winnie's Rebellion against Chinese Patriarchy

Female Narrative and Female Values

The question of literary value of a subject matter is not infrequent in canonical literary criticism. The question here is about whether or not the story and experience of women are appropriate for literary treatment. Moreover, can a good piece of literature be produced on the female saga, in which most of the incidents and stories revolve around the female characters? To make female characters the central characters is in itself a bold step toward affirming the worth and significance of female experience. A worthy piece of literature, novel in this case, at least in line with the expectation of the convention, should be about some really worthy characters, not about women who mostly misunderstand each other; and who have failed in their choice of first husband. But the novel violates this expectation, and takes to recounting the story of women. It is itself a feminist gesture on the part of the novel and the novelist.

The narrator might have begun to write a political novel about the effect of Japanese imperialism over China but ultimately the personal and familial dimension of the novel, related to the women, becomes more engaging than the political concern of the novel. This reminds one of the shift modern literature took in replacing the practice of recounting the story and history of the so-called nobility comprising the royalty, knight, and supernatural powers by the story of the common, downtrodden people. The only problem was that even with this shift, by which the common people got coverage in literature, half of the human race that is, the female race, was left unaccounted for. The stories and histories of the female people were neither seriously told nor heard with interest. So much so that, even the few successful female writers of the nineteenth century had to assume pseudonyms for the fear that they might be relegated to a lower status for the mere fact that the books were written by women. As Lois Tyson writes in

her commentary volume *Critical Theory Today*, “traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive” (83).

The novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* is noteworthy for a feminist reader simply for the reason that female characters claim the most interest. The major characters of the novel are two women, mother and daughter. The mother narrates her story to the daughter and this strengthens the bond between them. Thus, the first feminist character of the novel and the novelist lies in the fact that a good work of literature is spun around the life stories and the sufferings of the women back in the mid twentieth century.

It is a strategically significant issue whether a story or any piece of literature by women should have a universal significance to be counted as a good piece of literature or not. Surely, any piece of literature that talks about women's experience and feelings can also be significant. To some feminists, such as Adrienne Rich, Kate Millet, Sheila Ruth and the like, a literature can be important if it recounts the histories and stories of the female kind. If a novel, in this case *The Kitchen God's Wife*, centers mostly on the female story, it can be considered a feminist work in as much as it acknowledges the fact that even female can be the good stuff for literature. In this light, the novel is a truly feminist work, as it is mostly centered on two women, a Chinese mother settled in America and her Americanized daughter. Taking this starting premise of feminism as a literary movement which counts women stories as worthy of being treated in literature, one can cite a reference as to how the novel explores the secrets and stories of the mother and daughter relationship often strained by the unfavorable circumstances of life. The legacy of muteness or speechlessness is inherited by the mother until it is almost late for her to

come in terms with her daughter. But she manages to tell her daughter about her mother, thus explaining the cause of her own trouble in keeping the relationship with her daughter a smooth one. The tradition in the family, the subservient position of the mother passed on to the daughter, forms a psyche in the daughter which tells her that she has only subordinate position in her family. It is relevant to quote what Sheila Ruth observes the circumstances which make women weak:

Many factors in the environment conspire to impede women's competence and accomplishments in many areas—hostile or deprecating attitudes of incumbent men, lack of support and assistance from all quarters, dual and/or incompatible professional and nonprofessional functions, pervasiveness of the male (alien, inhospitable) ambience, and socialization that erodes confidence and self-assertion. (160)

Thus, many factors give the impression to the daughter that her position is a secondary one. The mother in the novel says the same thing when admits how she was influenced by her mother's situation. One can have glimpse of the family narrative from the quote below:

It is the same pain I have had for many years. It comes from keeping everything inside, waiting until it is too late.

I think my mother gave me this fault, the same kind of pain. She left me before she could tell me why she was leaving. . . .I never told you about my mother? That she left me? Oh. That's because I never wanted to believe it myself. So that's why I did not tell you about her. (102)

Here the mother is confessing how her mother transmitted the inhibitions that kept her from speaking thing on time. The mother practiced the same thing regarding her relationship with her daughter, and kept many things secret from the daughter. She feared if her daughter learns that her grandmother had left her mother to marry another man which could have affected her daughter negatively. But despite this fact, the daughter is only unhappy but not disappointed with the hidden truth of her mother.

Besides trying to save the mother from inevitable death, the daughter evinces the transcendental ability of the pre-Oedipal love to overcome all sorts of anger, including the patriarch's ostracism of Rose's grandmother as a belligerent promiscuous wife. Of the pre-mother/daughter connection, Helene Cixous holds:

In women there is always, more or less, something of the "mother" repairing and feeling, resisting separation, a force that does not let itself be cut off but that runs codes ragged. The relationship to childhood (the child she was, she is, she acts and makes and starts anew, and unites at the place where, as a sense, she even others herself), is no more cut off than is the relationship to the "mother," as it consists of delights and violences. (qtd. in Kaplan 38)

As suggested by Tan's title, the culinary motif plays out a saga about resisting phallic boundaries and setting up a paradigm of female liberation. Being centered on the affiliate impact of nourishment on the mother/daughter connection, *The Kitchen God's Wife* stresses the removal of the kitchen god from the altar in an arbitrary dethroning process and its substitution for a goddess who has no status at all, not even a named "statuette" (530). The seller tells us that the Goddess is one made by mistake; indeed, "they forgot to

write down its name on the bottom of her chair" (531). Winnie names her mistake-statue Lady Sorrow-Free instead of attributing to her the more respected title "Mrs. Kitchen God" (531).

Incorporated into Tan's text, the myth embodies the mother as a goddess-figure. Reconstructed, it marvels in deifying the betrayed wife and mother to the detriment of the kitchen God himself, thus, transcending the stereotype of Chinese mothers as victims or social outcasts. The novel brings them into the forefront, the note as if to claim tacitly that female stories, sufferings can as well be the subject of literature. And indeed it is proved by its selling records and awards and recognition in world literature.

Critique of Stereotypical Images of Female in the Novel

As intellectual beauty and virtues are supposed to be alien to women in traditional or patriarchal society, the only weapon women have in life for attracting and charming the men is their carnal and physical beauty. This view is supported by a great bulk of literature in any culture in the world. For example the well known epics *Odyssey* and *Iliad* in the west and *Ramayana* in the east are centered upon the troubles caused by beauty of women. When it comes to say women are beautiful, a plethora of epithets and symbols and images and similes are used. This is not the case regarding the male beauty, which is reflected in terms of their character, strength, intellectual prowess, and moral nobility. Since female are not entrusted with such noble virtues, they are given only the weaker weapon of charm and mannerisms and beauty which are at best disarming if the concerned party is ready to appreciate such qualities. Otherwise, female are without any significant positive power of their own. Whatever power they have in life comes from

being submissive, weak and in need of love and protection. It is induced by their physical beauty.

This observation leads one to face an excerpt from the novel under the study. Here is the accepted underlying meaning that if a woman is beautiful, she would be lucky enough to get married with a person of rank and standing. If not, her other qualities may not be able to secure her a good and rich family. If a woman had physical beauty, she would be lucky enough to get a good husband. The property of a woman, in this regard, is her beauty. It was the same case in China in the times of Pearl's grandmother. Pearl's mother, Winnie is telling the story about her mother, that is Pearl's grandmother back in China:

Maybe my mother was not pretty at all, and I only want to believe that she was. But then I think, why else did my father marry her? He was an important man. He could have had all kinds of wives—which he did. Back then there was no other reason to marry a second, third, or fourth wife, except to use a woman's pettiness to add to a man's prestige. So I think my mother must have been pretty. (120)

Another social restriction upon women is directed at making them mute and crippled by imbibing the false ideas of gentility and mannerism. The instructions of this school are that a woman should not open her mouth to ask question or to tell stories to others. She is supposed to appreciate the patriarchal norms and values.

Old Aunt, on the other hand, did not go to that school. No school whatsoever. She was raised in a feudal family, the traditional way: the girl's eyes should never be used for reading, only for sewing. The girl's

ears should never be used for listening to ideas, only to orders. The girl's lips should be small, rarely used, except to express appreciation or ask for approval. (121)

This is like using blinders for making the horse to see straight and walk straightforward only. Women are well trained from their childhood so that they would make better servants, play mates and caretakers of the household activities. This is the traditional concept of the patriarchal society in order to marginalize and exploit females intellectually

The life and skills of a girl are all preparations for a happy home of her in-laws and husband. The girls are taught to cook, dress, speak, and learn other manners and skills so that they can manage their homes after their marriage. This attitude is practiced early on in the life of the girls raised in a typical patriarchal society. Reference here is to the upbringing of Pearl's mother who was meticulously taught by her Old aunt to cook well, maintain the house well for her married life. After recounting the lessons she tells of her training back at home in those times, and how she wanted her daughter to follow the same too:

I learned all those lessons for my future. Oh, I tried to teach you these same things when you were growing up. But you never listened. . . . you see how eager I was to learn? When I was young, I already knew everything must look good, taste good, mean good things. That way it lasts longer, satisfies your appetite, and also satisfies your memory for a long, long time. (137)

Thus, the early life training of a girl in education, mannerism and other practical skills are all directed towards keeping her future happy in relation to her home she will get to after her marriage. Primarily, it is not the enhancement of the personal skills in itself, nor the realization of her personality, but of rendering her an effective, cultured persona in the art of managing homely relations and conduct. That is finally to make her a servant, subservient and pleasing figure to the husband's family. This is the lesson of patriarchy to women everywhere in the world, not least in the China of the mid twentieth century. By exposing such stories, the writer is really passing a critique upon such masculist mode of thought process and behavior toward female personality.

In the chapter of "Weak and Strong" shares her life experience with her American friend she compares Chinese women's life with Americans. The Chinese domination has made their life usual to live in such contradictory life weak and strong at the same time.

Winnie tells her daughter years later, "I became weak and strong at the same time. Maybe according to your American mind, you can't be both, that would be a contradiction. This fact of becoming weak and strong at the same time is an anomaly in the western culture. Its meaning is to be found within Chinese culture. Ethnic feminism addresses this variance and anomaly as acceptable as our experience is unique in them depending on our society and culture.

In the chapter entitled "American Dance", Winnie recounts of her being barbarically beaten by her first husband. It was not unusual in China then to join and dance in a party, yet it was not so easily digested, especially if the husband was suspicious of his wife's affairs. To understand the delicacy of the issue, the culture-specific context is to be understood. Winnie has in fact deliberately joined the dance to

arouse Wen Fu's envy and anger, thus precipitating the ruin of their relations, paving the way for their divorce:

Suddenly he grabbed my hair and threw me to the floor. You want to be a whore! He shouted. I will let you be a whore. He went to a table and pulled something out from the drawer. He threw down a piece of paper, and then a pen and a bottle of ink.

"Now I am divorcing you". He said. "Write that down, my husband is divorcing me".

When I looked up, I saw he was pointing a gun to my head, smiling crazily." It's no use! Our marriage is finished," He said, "if you don't write this, I will kill you! (393)

In China, a husband could divorce his wife at his will. The vulnerable position of a wife can be assessed in such a society. Even then Winnie dared to tease her husband's anger. That was bold step on her part. To rightly appraise her valor, we need to look into her culture specific situation.

Women as Possessions and Properties

Chapter seven of the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* is entitled "Dowry Counting", which is the central issue for a feminist investigation in the novel. The section is related to the marriage of the main character of the novel. When she was going to be married, as was usual in the Chinese society of those days, the father or parents of the girls would dole out enough money to the daughter for her future. This used to be a great attraction to the bridegroom's side. So, more often than not, the bridegrooms-to-be would search for a wealthy family with only one daughter. The intention was more to get more dowry and

connection with top the family than to find a matching spouse. This fact was not hidden from the discerning eyes of Pearl's mother, then bride-to-be. She thus recounts of the marriage proposal to her:

You see, Wen Fu decided he really did want to marry Peanut, not because he loved her sincerely – he wanted to marry into her family. And really, he was no different from most men back then. Getting married in those days was like buying real estate. Here, you see a house you want to live in, you find a real estate agent. Back in China, you saw a rich family with a daughter, you found a go-between who knew how to make a good business deal. (164)

Thus, marriage was rendered a sort of business deal for getting entrance into higher circle of people. It was purely a business deal, a money-minded approach to the most fundamental of human relationship—marriage. It is an affront for any sensitive human being, let alone the female kind, to hear of such transaction-like approach to relationship and establishment of a home on conjugal basis calculated from material profit viewpoint. The system is widely spread in the world, not least in Asia where dowry system is notorious as a social stigma.

The father thinks that it is his duty to educate his daughter about succumbing her will to that of his. The training of a female child is how to become a good wife and mother later on which goes with the patriarchal idea of femininity. A woman is a good woman if she is able to serve her husband's family well. One is well reminded of what Mary Wollstonecraft wrote about this very issue back in the eighteenth century: "The

mighty business of female life is to please” (398). Pearl’s mother too was told the same by her father:

He turned around to face me. “From now on,” he said at last with a stern look, “you must consider what your husband’s opinions are. Yours do not matter so much anymore. Do you understand?”

I nodded eagerly, grateful that my father had taught me this useful lesson in such a subtle way. And then he said I would stay in his house for the next week so I could shop for my dowry. (178)

It is the reality of any male-dominated society. The ideas, opinions and desires and aspirations of a female are not counted in a patriarchal society. The women have to be subsumed under the patronizing will, plan and opinions of her husband. This is a point that needs a severe criticism in the novel. The way the mother revisits those memories make it clear to the reader that she is disapproving of those opinions of her father who wanted his daughter to totally lose her identity and personality and will so as to be a pleasant and civilized wife to her husband.

The pity with a female body in relation to her married life is that she does not have a control over it herself. Now it is a sort of pledged with her husband; whenever he wants he can use it and if he does not want he can just let it go unused. The legality of marriage has thus reduced the marital relationship to an accepted rape, speaking blandly. Winnie tells similar story of forced and unnatural sexual relationship with her monster-like husband Wen Fu who used to inflict various harassments upon her. The behaviour of Wen Fu is representative of the male view about wife in a patriarchal society which is further supported by the text itself:

Every night Wen Fu wanted me. But it was not the same way as when we were at his parents' house. I had been shy then, and he had been gentle, always coaxing me, soothing me, stopping when I became too afraid, before I screamed too much. But in Hangechow, he said it was time I learned how to be a proper wife. (208)

It is always the man telling the woman to be a proper wife. The husband is never expected to be a proper husband. It seems, as if the wife was made only for fulfilling the sexual and societal needs of the husband, at the cost of her personality, individuality and happiness. This code of ethics has its roots in the distinctly masculinist philosophy which holds the view that a wife's success is measured in terms of her sacrifice for her husband and family disregarding herself.

The personal story of Winnie, as it is evident from what has been explained up to now, is inextricably intertwined with the history of China. In this regard, it is fruitful to see side by side the onset of Wen Fu on Winnie and the Japanese invasion on China. In addition to articulating the harmful impact of imperialist understanding of history, the novel acknowledges the historical role played by patriarchal ideology in its moulding of Chinese women. As Winnie puts it, "all those phrases about ladies with voices as pretty-sounding as lutes, skin as white as jade, their gracefulness flowing like calm rivers. Why did stories always describe women that way, making us believe that we had to be that way too?" (120). These stories which describe women as having voice as pretty-sounding as lutes objectify Chinese women, perhaps helping to explain why Japanese soldiers used them as "chamber pots" (195) or public toilets during the rape of Nanking. Moreover, these stories imagine Chinese women as having skin "the colour of summer peach" (120)

could also help to account for them being eaten. As the novel so gruesomely records, “a Japanese sergeant-major raped and murdered a number of Chinese women. Then . . . he sliced off piece from the woman’s thigh, fried them and made a meal for the members of the unit” (245). The Chinese women are compared to peach. Peach are eaten and relished. Likewise, the Japanese literally ate up the Chinese women. The Chinese women here become inflicted in two ways. On the one hand, they are tortured and exploited by the Chinese males. And, on the other hand, they are victimized by the Japanese invaders.

The traditional role assigned to women is that of a server and follower, not of an independent thinker and decision maker. Women should not think and speak independently; rather they should comply with the desire and opinion of their husbands. If they fail to agree with this notion, the women are looked down upon as unnatural breed. Winnie also experienced this set of patriarchal treatment from her first husband.

Winnie thinks it would please her husband if she agrees to the divorce proposal. He had once had talked about the divorce. So, she prepares the document for the divorce, and presents it to him. To her surprise and consternation, he does not at all take it any positively. It is not that he is sorry to have his wife made so dissatisfied with him as to compel her to draft a divorce paper. He is dissatisfied that she has taken the initiative this in proposing the divorce. By doing that she has proved that she dared to be independent, that she has the guts to challenge, and that she is in the powerful position to take that decision. So, he disapproves this act of Winnie and clearly tells her that it is not she who can tell when they should have divorce. It is solely up to him to take the decision which is clear in the text itself:

I did not write this," he said quietly. "I am not asking for a divorce."
 And I knew he did not do this to say that he loved me, that he was so sorry for what he had done. He did this to show me who was the boss. Because after he tore up my chance, he pointed his finger at me and said in a hoarse voice, "When I want to divorce you, I will tell you. You don't tell me what to do. (355)

Here, the crux of the contention is not that the husband loves his wife, so he cannot let her be separated from him. Rather the husband is dissatisfied that the wife has dared to propose the divorce in the first place. If the divorce is to be undertaken, it must be proposed by him, not by her. Only then there would be space for him to show off that it was he who had the power to get the divorce materialized. The power politics, so pervasive in life, is seen operating here in the masculinist arrogance of Wen Fu. He cannot accept his wife proposing the divorce. If it had been proposed by him, she would have to accept without any demure. This just shows how the men think themselves as decision makers concerned with their family, but the women can never take any initiative in decision making themselves.

There are several instances in the novel in which Wen Fu shamelessly indulges in promiscuities and aberrations on sexual matter, outright at the house he lives with his wife and others. He tolerates no comment or concern over his activity. But once, when his wife was requested and was dancing with a Chinese American Jimmy Louie who worked as translator at the American Information Service, he gets mad at her. This is one of the examples of how much envious and possessive nature he harbours about his wife, easily forgetting that it was just a social etiquette for her to dance with him at the

function. He calls her a “Whore! Fox-devil! Traitor!” because she had danced with an American (392). This is indicative of the double standard of male in a patriarchal society. He cannot see his wife socializing with any other male, but himself takes the liberty of sporting with any woman of his fancy.

Chinese Patriarchy and Japanese Imperialism

The elements of oppression on women can take, among many subtle forms, the main three forms: domestic violence, economic oppression, and institutional power. Chinese women have historically suffered multiple and intersecting oppression: at home, in societies: Chinese and American; governments: Chinese and Japanese. The novel presents the personal experiences of the character named Winnie Louie. She has undergone all the three forms of oppression: at home, society, and the national and international level too. She acts like a tape recorder, a memory device retelling her personal story and at the same time unfolding the national history of China as well. To put it another way, in addition to discussing Japan’s onslaught on China, Winnie narrates her personal bad dream like experience with a husband in China. The Chinese male domination upon the Chinese women and the Japanese occupation of China as nation are similar in the sense that the oppressors are males in both instances. Only difference is, one is domestic male oppressor, the other is from outside.

It is commonly accepted among the critics of imperial discourse and imperialism that without fail, the military power is always on the position of an invader, a rapist and an oppressor. Meaning, there is similarity between the rapist instinct of male and the invasive motive of an imperial and colonial power. This type of reading is not without textual support in the case of the novel *The Kitchen God’s Wife* too. The Japanese

imperial power is the bad guy, the rapist, of the country of China. Literally too, many Chinese women are raped throughout the country. The novel also records the similar terminologies while narrating the tortures brought by the Japanese soldiers upon the Chinese people.

Although a Chinese air force pilot, Winnie's husband Wen Fu is also likened with the Japanese in as much as he turns a torturer to his wife and other female characters in the novel. He literally rapes his wife and others as well. One account of how he molested the servant girls is recorded in the novel. Winnie recalls how she knew the secret of the girl being raped:

And now I don't remember exactly how I got all her words out, how I pulled them out, one by one. But that afternoon I found out that my husband had started to put his hands on her while I was in the hospital, that she had struggled each time, and each time he had raped her. She did not say "rape," of course. A girl that young and innocent, how could she know such a word? She knew only how to blame herself. (328)

As the invaded country is not able to stand up with due resistance against the invading Japanese military power, so the two women, the wife and the raped girl, are not able to protest against the acts of Wen Fu either. The girl blames it was her fault she let him touch in the first place. And the wife is embarrassed that if she raises the issue everyone would laugh at her for having husband "who chases after a servant girl because his own wife is not enough –the classic old story" (328). In both cases, it is the female who is most victimized.

Similar is the plight of Nanking, a most damaged province of China during the Japanese invasion. Nanking is literally raped and molested and murdered. According to Adams, “*The Kitchen God’s Wife* represents both the rape of Nanking and the rape of Winnie, drawing attention to the similarities between Japanese military and a Chinese husband” (16). For instance, neither Japan nor Wen Fu recompensates for their crimes and damages over China and Winnie respectively; both stand out as the brutal oppressors. Instead, they both distort the history, the truth and claim they are the victims indeed. As the critic Chang puts it, they both “assume the role of the victim” (21). They falsely propagate the cooked up and crooked story that they were insulted and demoralized. As Chang further writes, “With respect to *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, the patriarchal institutions of marriage and of law operate to ensure that Wen Fu’s version of things stands” (21). Wen Fu falsifies the reality of his torturing his wife, of divorcing her and hating her, and acts as if he is robbed of his husbandly rights and his son. In the court, he falsely accuses Winnie that “she had given up a respectable life, turned her back on her father, let her own son die – all because she was crazy for American sex” (478). And the court accepts this reason enough to pass the verdict on his side, sentencing Winnie to two years imprisonment. It is interesting to see the Chinese court, one of the patriarchal institutions that legalize and support the patriarchal code, permits the sexual and textual violator – textual violator in the sense that Wen Fu has twisted the reality and created another version of the story – to transform into the violated. There is no space for the real victim to appeal to, and get compensated for her tortures from the husband. There is no language even for “criticizing men or the society” (325). Winnie is both marginalized and misrepresented in the Chinese society which is patriarchal even in its justice system

which can accuse the victimized wife and mother further.

The Nanking Massacre, also known as "The Rape of Nanking," is a rare example of genocide against women. It is generally remembered for the invading forces' barbaric treatment of Chinese women. Many thousands of them were killed after gang rape, and tens of thousands of others brutally injured and traumatized. Meanwhile, approximately a quarter of a million defenseless Chinese men were rounded up as prisoners-of-war and murdered *en masse*, used for bayonet practice, or burned and buried alive.

Japanese forces invaded and occupied Manchuria in northeast China in 1931, setting up the puppet state of Manchukuo. After the manufactured "Marco Polo Bridge Incident" of July 1937, the Japanese launched a full scale invasion of China, capturing Shanghai on 12 November and the imperial capital, Nanking, on 13 December. Numerous atrocities were committed en route to Nanking, but they could not compare with the epic carnage and destruction the Japanese unleashed on the defenseless city after Chinese forces abandoned it to the enemy.

Women were killed in indiscriminate acts of terror and execution, but the large majority died after extended and excruciating gang-rape. "Surviving Japanese veterans claim that the army had officially outlawed the rape of enemy women," writes Iris Chang in her book *The Rape of Nanking*. But "the military policy forbidding rape only encouraged soldiers to kill their victims afterwards." She cites one soldier's recollection that "It would be all right if we only raped them. I shouldn't say all right. But we always stabbed and killed them. Because dead bodies don't talk ... Perhaps when we were raping her, we looked at her as a woman, but when we killed her, we just thought of her as

something like a pig" (Chang 49-50). The Japanese soldiers raped and then killed the women.

As the territory of a country is invaded by the imperial power, in the case of the novel China being invaded by Japan, so the body and life of a woman is controlled, used—and worse, abused— by a man. This act is done even in public, in the presence of one's seniors and friends. Once it so happens that after a dinner party Winnie sings a song with one of the army man among the diners. Wen Fu her husband blames her of insincerity. He gets mad without reason and tells her to kneel down and ask for forgiveness. She is expected by her friend Helen to do the same so that his anger would be soothed. But the terrible humiliation she suffers from is not noticed by them. When she is thus tortured, nobody dares to come ahead for her assistance. She feels puzzled why they were all so scared of siding with her despite the all irrational blames and injustices cast upon her by her husband. Years later in America Winnie recalls the incident and tells her daughter:

I remember this: All those men, Hulan – nobody tried to stop him. They watched and did nothing as I lay with my head touching the floor. They said nothing when my husband ordered me to say, "Sorry, I am wrong, you are right. Please forgive me." They did not protest and tell Wen Fu, "This is enough," when he told me to beg for forgiveness, again and again.

(318)

Her beaten up and tortured body, and her humiliated psyche do not rouse any response and appropriate action from those present there at the party. They might have thought, she is his wife any way; why bother about such beating which is only too

common in the society. Politically, the world is no different for the small and weak countries. The powerful ones invade and annex their land and the people forcibly; they attack without any justifiable reason, and the world peace-keeping body just keeps silent, at best issues a communiqué and stops there. One can see this in the world today where the military powers are in the look out for pretexts to force the small countries to agree with their unjust demand and conditions.

The death of Wen Fu and Winnie's daughter Yiku provides another occasion for exposing the true character and nature of an irresponsible and biased male. Yiku falls seriously ill and Winnie hurries to inform the father about her illness. At that time Wen Fu is at his friend's house playing mah jong. The doctor also is there. When the doctor sees the mother is greatly troubled, he feels the seriousness of the case and stands ready to help the sick child. But the insensitive father just rebukes the mother and mocks that she has exaggerated the case. He is much more interested in enjoying the game than in saving the life of his daughter. He not only does not believe in the seriousness of the case, but also stops the doctor from going to treat the child. Disturbed in the game, he gets furious and blames his wife of exaggerating the case and swears he would not care even if the girl dies. He tells them all:

Play! Keep playing! My wife is exaggerating." He laughed. "She sees an ant, thinks it is a lion. The baby sneezed once, she thinks it's pneumonia. Sit down, sit down, keep playing a little". When Winnie says that the child may die, he gets mad because she contradicted him and swears, "If she dies, I wouldn't care. (336).

After about an hour of that incident, the baby turns visibly serious. Her little body starts throwing and tossing itself up and the mother takes her to the place where Wen Fu is still playing the game. Seeing the condition of the child, all the men there stop playing and all is quiet there. Then, without any shame, as if it is the first time he has come to know about the seriousness of the illness of the child, Wen Fu gets furious at Winnie and starts abusing her with epithets: “You stupid woman!” Wen Fu he shouted then cursed. Why didn’t you tell me she was this way? What kind of mother are you!” (337) He now pretends that he was not informed in time about the seriousness of the illness of the child. Thus he easily blames the wife for not being a caring mother. But he forgets and pretends to forget how nastily he had sworn that he would not care even if the child dies. This is sheer shameless and lack of moral sense and irresponsibility on his part to blame his wife. She had already warned and that time he laughed at her, accused her of disturbing his good mood and game.

This scene, together with the former one in which the mother is humiliated, has been of great attention to critics in explicating how worthless a female life is for the male. Adams observes this scene thus:

What these two events reveal is that a beaten woman and a dying child do not function as evidence of suffering. In this context, their bodies fail to signify in a way that acknowledges both Winnie’s and Yiku’s pain.

Mother and daughter bear the marks of abuse on their bodies, but this is not enough to call into question the authority of Wen Fu’s interpretation.

(20)

It is in the hands of the men to interpret and give meanings to the experience and feelings of women in a patriarchal. The women's own ideas, life and feelings count for nothing. They are not accepted as individuals with their own rights and identities. Rather they are supposed to be available for the use of the men, as if they were just some sorts of possessions and use and throw type of articles. Even the life and death issue of women are not so importantly taken by the men, as it is proved by the case of the negligence shown by Wen Fu towards his daughter Yiku's serious illness.

The novel attempts to invite the readers to take a side with the inflicted party by recounting the rape of Nanking on the one hand and of the Chinese women on the other hand. By doing so, it combines the penetrating insights of postcolonialism and feminism effectively. Both of these theoretical tools can be best utilized to show the changing status of the oppressor/oppressed at personal and societal level. After reading the novel, one is compelled to review world history. One is invited to ask such questions as to why people and countries try to manipulate others. The answer lies in the insight that politics is pervasive and that it affects even familial relationship. No matter what the socio-economic condition of a family, the male, the father, is supposed to know all and be all and control all. Similarly, despite the injustice involved in dominating over other countries, an imperial power always finds pretext to control other countries. The story of rapes and history of invasions are ultimately explained by the power-mania of the concerned invaders. In both case, it is the male that exercises brutal physical force to control and devastate the other. At the individual level, a man controls, marries, rapes, and divorces a woman and at the national level the imperial power controls and exploits a nation. In both instances, the act of oppression is exercised by the male. This is the link

between patriarchy and imperialism. Men are agents of both systems of oppression. In this way we can conclude that patriarchal and imperialistic values run together to dominate women and men.

Winnie's Revolt Leads to her Freedom

In the second chapter of *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the mythological figure of the Kitchen God is first introduced. Winnie relates to the Kitchen God's wife and her situation. Winnie does not feel that the Kitchen God is worth humoring. She says in the story that he was not worthy of being a god; she says "Why should I want that kind of person to judge me, a man who cheated his wife? His wife was the good one not him?" (62) This story and Winnie's reaction to it parallels her life where she is abused physically and emotionally by her husband. I am particularly bothered by how much abuse Winnie is willing to endure at the hands of Wen Fu both towards her and towards her children. I am annoyed that this woman endures so much, yet perhaps because of her culture or her superstitions she seems to feel that that is her lot in life, her destiny. But now she has come to realize the injustice the Kitchen God inflicts on his wife: the same way a typical patriarchal male does to his faithful wife.

Winnie is the product of a culture that privileges the Confucian ideal, raising women to be passive and silent in their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers. Her story reveals the suffering of a woman whose brutish husband abuses her privately and publicly while the couple's friends and acquaintances and, by extension, the entire culture that shaped them pretend that nothing is amiss.

Due to the fact that Pearl does not fully comprehend who her mother is or what her past was like, she has a difficult time understanding how her mother is so different

from her American born father. In the beginning of the novel, Pearl talks of being five years old and believing that goblins would fly out of the eyes of a carved pumpkin. .

Women are kept under male domination as long as they try to comply with the masculist demand of women as submissive, subservient and weak. In fact, at first, majority of women think and quietly surrender to the notion that if they try to live up to the images of themselves as perceived by the masculist society, they will be paid back in the long run, that they will be accepted and loved and respected. But this illusion cannot hold some women for long as they see through the false ideals of the patriarchate. So such women dare to defy the false restraints and expectations imposed upon them by the male counterparts. A sort of rebellion no less than a political revolution begins, shaking the ramshackle shackles of patriarchal domination to its very foundations.

In the context of the novel, there are two kinds of revolution, opposition, and uprising: the personal and the political or public. At the personal the defiance of Winnie against her bullying husband, and at the political, the Chinese defiance of the Japanese imperial forces. The parallel informs and structures the novel in such a way that the two cannot be separated. Winnie's freedom and new life in the west would not have been possible if there had been no opposition of the Japanese power by the Chinese assisted by the American air force. The personal and the public are thus intertwined in the novel's very structure.

The central character Winnie, an up brought of Chinese patriarchy, dares to challenge long prevailing patriarchal injustices inflicted upon women like her at home and in society at large .Similar to Winnie, Wan Betty also has suffered at the hands of her family: "when my husband died, the survivor money from the air force all of it went to

his family! Nothing to me. So you see what I have to do to earn food for myself and this child inside me.” (201) Women are demanded of much, that they give a child to continue the lineage of the in-law family:

Now the family is saying I should go to Nanchaag, have the baby, give them their grand child .after that they said I can leave, do what I want. I ask you, why should I go there and let them treat me so bad? Do they think I am a duck laying eggs so they can eat them? (201)

Winnie also was abused at her in-laws house, mostly by her husband.

And often in the morning he would complain, telling me I was not a good wife that I had no passion, not like other women he knows. And my head and body would hurt as he told me about this woman and that woman, how good she was, how willing, how beautiful. I was not angry. I did not know I was supposed to be angry. This was China. A woman had no right to be angry but I was unhappy, knowing my husband was still dissatisfied with me, and that I would have to go through more suffering to show him I was a good wife. (210)

But the same demure Winnie is made into a rebel after intolerable cases of torture and humiliation. One time, after being threatened with a gun, she manages to get hold on it quietly, and now has Wen Fu at her mercy. That time his fake bravery gives in, caves in, and he implores for life as a dog wagging its tail. The gun surely is a symbol of power that comes upon the hand of Winnie.

Winnie understands it is not good to blame other women, because they too are socially constructed to behave in a dominating way with junior women, as daughter-in-laws, etc. This understanding has an edge of sisterhood attitude among women. It encourages solidarity among women, as they see each other as puppets in the hands of men, as the victims of the society.

And perhaps this was wrong of me, to blame another woman for my own miseries. But that was how I was raised-never to criticize men or the society they ruled, or Confucius, that awful man who made that society. I could blame only other women who were more afraid than I. (325)

Winnie wishes to defend a servant girl, but is sorely afraid to do so. Yet, her attitude is one of compassion and love for the oppressed little thing. It is a symptom that one day someone would dare to question and rebel against the injustices of the men.

And then I thought what people think when they find out? What will they think of me- if I take side against my husband and defend a servant girl instead? I imagine Hulan scolding me, accusing me of seeing only worst in everything and everybody. I saw others criticizing me, for not managing my house better. I could imagine people laughing-a husband who chases after a servant girl because his own wife is not enough-the classic old story! (328)

Her disagreement with her husband and family finally leads her to take violent actions against him, and opposing him in every way possible. She has to pay a price for that, yet she achieves greater rewards in the long run.

Winnie accepts prison instead of compromising with her former husband Wen Fu. In her trial everybody expects an answer that of “forgiveness” with Wen fu. Even the husband cocksurely admits that if she asked for forgiveness he would grant and he says, “If she says she is sorry I will forgive everything and she can come home with me. He smiled at me like a generous man” (477). But she does not comply with his pleas and blackmails and threats. Now she has outgrown her timidity and tolerance of oppression. This valiant and defying spirit finally earns her a new life, husband, a new country and new world. She says, “I would rather sleep on the concrete floor of a jail. I heard myself say in a loud voice” then go to that man’s house! (477).

After hearing Winnie’s strong determination for divorce, he goes mad and shouts at her by tearing the divorce paper, “Now you are the same whore where you always were” (502). From long time back patriarchy has accused women as whore and bitch, if they go against the society. But by now Winnie has realized that she would be abused but without daunting to act she would never go beyond the patriarchy. In order to live without being discriminated, she must bear such insults. “If I obeyed he might still take my tickets, he might still take my life” (502).

Winnie upon the gun point makes Wen Fu as she likes him to do:

I pulled the trigger again this time hitting the floor. He scrambled out of his paints now throw the paints out the window. . . . go change your dirty paints! Wen Fu ran out the door carrying, claiming I would never be through with him. (504)

This running out and away from her, her life is the sure sign that from now onwards Wen Fu cannot dare to beat or threaten her so easily as he used to in the past. Winnie finally

leaves him, elopes with her true love, the American air force personnel, who brings her to a new world, America.

Chapter IV: Winnie's Victory

The novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* makes a profitable reading for all the readers interested in the impact inflicted by Japanese imperialism in the life of Chinese people as individuals and as a nation. The novel is a tale of the various hardships, dishonor and torments which women have to face in such a traditional society as the Chinese one. The novel is worth pondering for its immediacy and appeal, because it touches upon some of the most compelling issues such as the predicament of women in an anti-female society, the representation, misrepresentation of women as an object to be possessed and taken care of by men etc. Also, the novel is a pondering upon the political reality of a country defeated by imperial power because of the inefficiency of the government at the national level.

The many instances in the novel wherein the central character Winnie Louie, her prematurely dead daughter Yiku, her servant girl, another girl who stayed with her as Wen Fu's concubine, are treated by the males as insignificant individuals. Such treatments indicate that the female in the Chinese society of the early and mid twentieth century did not have much of identity and value of life as individuals and members of the society. The women in China were not given due human respect and recognition. The will and desire of their husbands became their destiny.

As the title of the novel refers to a Chinese folk tale in which the wife of a kitchen god has to suffer much, so is the plight of women and wife in a patriarchal society. They rear the children, feed the family and propagate the dynasty of their husbands but in return they get only humiliation, abuse and torture. They lose their identity for the sake of their husband's family where they were not born in. And, for this sacrifice, they are paid

back with derision and untold suffering. They empty their life to fill the family of a man, but get torture and stigma for even slightly failing to comply with the demands of the family.

The very plight of being recognized only as somebody's wife, and not by their own name or on their own distinct designation, is an issue worth contending for the feminist writers and theorists. It seems at first as if Amy Tan also seems to be accepting the tradition of making the women lose their identity by naming her novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*. But at the deeper level, she sides with the oppressed female race and in fact raises a strong condemnation against the Japanese invasion of China along with all the inhuman suppression of women by men in China back in the early twentieth century. The title of the novel is suggestive in both ways: the woman is recognized only as somebody's wife, not as herself, and the husband is tantamount to or similar to god. The wife is the possession, the devotee the servant. The husband is the lord, the god, the master. This set of belief is the product of a patriarchal bent of mind that always sees women as non-human beings or as secondary human beings at best. The novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* rejects this traditional notion of gender which regards the husband as the ruler and the wife as the ruled one, and it appeals for women liberation and dignity. Therefore, it is a feminist novel calling for gender equity and dignity.

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