Sandra Kumamoto Stanley in her Introduction to Other Sisterhoods writes “Resistance...Difference...Multiplicity...These words have characterized intervention of U.S. Women of Colour into the narrative histories of American feminism” (1). As a product shaped by the Civil Rights and Women’s movements, women of colour have emerged as a self-identified collective in the feminist agenda of the U.S since the late sixties and early seventies. Since then, women of colour have challenged race and class blindness in the white women’s movement and also the sexist practice in male centred antiracist groups. Just as white feminists earlier, sought to decentre a hegemonic male subject, in the same way women of colour seek to dislodge any mythos of a homogeneous female subject identified with white middle class norms. Women of colour are shaped by what Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill call “the constraining walls of social location,” that is, their specific
positioning at the intersection of categories that describe their
location based on class, race, gender, and sexuality and of cultural
representation that reflect, repress or distort these social locations.
This group can resist constraining location and representation
through various forms of agencies. Activism — social as well as
political, is one such agency, which makes the woman of colour
visible. In the opinion of Dionne Espinoza, “narratives of women of
colour produce cultural forms of self-inscription that consolidate
self-naming initiated by activist organizing and coalition politics.”
Espinoza believes that of all the inscriptions, the testimonial style
most effectively narrates individual and collective histories as
layered expressions of individual embodiment in a society that is
hierarchically organized...” (*Other Sisterhoods* 48). Tan’s novels can
be read as contributions made by the woman of colour to the
American literary agenda. The themes and characters dealt by this
Chinese American writer generate enquiry into the complex
negotiations and issues confronting the ethnic women of her
community living in America. The subject woman of colour has
moved from a positioning as a subject of oppression to one as a
subject who responds to oppression through multiple modes of
resistant self-understanding. Tan and Mukherjee, writing from
within their specific ethnic cultural locations in the U.S have
portrayed woman both as object of patriarchal victimisation, and as
subject: resisting, surviving, and avenging her victimisation/victimiser.

The impact of gender on the Asian women in America varies enormously, within the same class and ethnic group. While the idea that female children are of less value than male children permeates all Asian culture, the effect of this value system on an American-born woman is quite different than on an immigrant one. For immigrant women, arrival in America can be liberating: societal norms of the majority community frequently provide greater personal freedom than permitted in Asian society.

Simmone de Beauvoir in her monumental work on feminisms *The Second Sex* has drawn attention to the cultural constructions of the feminine in the following quote: “One is not born, but rather becomes a women. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in society: it is civilizations as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is derived as feminine” (267) Beauvoir’s statement offers an illuminating insight into the study of gender-ethnicity relations while analysing the Asian women literary representation in these narratives.

Following the argument posited by Beauvoir, it has come to be contended that the idea of femininity and womanhood would
differ across countries/culture/races. Kate Millet has, similarly reiterated that, "woman far from being an immutable essence, is in fact a culturally varied construct which each society produces for particular purposes" (*The Sexual Politics* 36). The different constructions of gender are largely a result of religion, myth, and philosophy influencing a society/community. The role expectations of an Asian woman will therefore differ from her white, American counterpart. Even within the Asian community differences exist between a Indian Hindu woman and a Chinese woman. Vrinda Nabar in her study *Caste as Woman* argues that traditions and mythology have an important hold on the Indian subconscious. In very crucial ways it affects sensibility responses to an extent not experienced in the west. Nabar illustrates this by the fact that very few men or women in the west, even among conservative believers would 'consciously' use the Virgin Mary to uphold present day ideals of female perfection or purity. On the other hand, "the readiness with which most Indians grasp at mythological stereotypes like Sita or Savitri, or their reservations about Draupadi, are an obvious indication that for the Indian present day ideals are still governed by the traditions of the past" (22).

Under the broad definition of ethnicity, one that recognises the essentially ethnic quality of American life, it becomes possible to uncover connections between the female and the ethnic experience
in America. Substantiated by Beauvoir's theory of alterity being primordial to human consciousness itself, the category of the Other has important ramifications for the negotiations of identity embarked upon by ethnic women in America. Mary Dearborn in her work *Pocahontas's Daughters* opines that, "a study of ethnic women in America can reveal the female version of the American national character" (Intro4-5). The ethnic woman according to Carolyn Heilbrun is twice marginalised. This has been stated by many immigrant Asian writers in US. For instance, in the essay, "Defining Genealogies; Feminist Reflections on Being South Asian in North America" Chandra Talpade Mohanty talks about her personal experience of living in North America in this way "being a foreign student and a woman at that, meant being either dismissed as irrelevant (the quiet Asian woman stereotype), treated in racist ways ... celebrated or eroticised" (Our Feet Walk the Sky 352). The essay gives insight into the politics of gender and race operating in the construction of South Asian woman's identity in North America. Earlier, the issues and concerns of the Asian woman lay shrouded in silence and invisibility. Asian women "have historically used silence as a tool of protest" (128). However contemporary Asian American women writers today attempt to voice the hitherto unheard, unspoken tales of suffering of their racial sisters. In her
Introduction to the anthology *The Forbidden Stitch*, Shirly Geok-Lin Lim makes this observation

...the literature produced by first generation Asian American women writers reflect relatively privileged backgrounds. They were women of high social status, well educated and acceptable to a white reading public. . . Another generation of women, American daughters of Asian parents, express a different set of thematics;...embracing the American present inform.. the painful familial and psychological divisions that Asian ethnicity can give rise to in a deeply homogenizing society (Intro 11-12).

This difference is seen manifested in the fiction of first generation Indian American writer Bharati Mukherjee and the second generation Chinese American Amy Tan. These writers, women of colour, have inherited the scene. They strike new notes in their exploration of subjectivity as gendered and identified against the backdrop of white "Otherness." They resist racist literary representations of their tribe. The novels of Mukherjee and Tan exemplify the new literary agenda of ethnic women in America of the post sixties.
The universal suffering of woman, all over the globe, notwithstanding, the extent of suffering, and the methods, vary among country/race/culture. Reading gender and ethnicity as negotiated in the narratives by the Asian American women writers Amy Tan and Bharati Mukherjee makes an interesting analysis. Though they differ in their ethnicity, the Chinese woman shares with her Indian counterpart the erasure of her individuality, her subordination to patriarchy and its institutions. Sucheta Mazumdar aptly voices this in the introduction to the anthology Making Waves. "Asian women in America have emerged not as individuals but as nameless and faceless members of an alien community. Their identity has been formed by the lore of the majority community, not by their own history, their own stories" (1). The writings of Tan and Mukherjee voice the hitherto muted voices of the Asian women living in America. By creating women-centred plots they offer the women's perspectives on issues of social concern — family, marriage, dowry, role of wife, mother, cross-cultural generational conflicts, gender atrocities within marriage as well as patriarchal attitudes operating in society. Perhaps the troubles of an Indian woman might differ from her Chinese sister; nevertheless, coloured women on the whole, whether African, Chinese, Indian or other Asian countries, have always carried the burden of the family; slaved for husband and children, often with a great degree of self-
denial. In this she is different from her western counterpart who gives priority to individual self over society. Therefore using a paradigm that is white, middle-class, and western may not be universally applicable. Dianne E. Sadoff examines the literature by African-American women and notes that “race and class oppression intensify the black writer’s need to discover an untroubled matrilineal heritage” (Black Women in America 198). Referring to Alice Walker’s adoption of Zora Neale Hurston as a literary foremother, Sadoff shows how the contemporary black woman writer covers more profoundly than the white writer, her ambivalence about matrilineage and her link to an oral as well as written tradition. Readers like Sadoff suggest that “although matrilineage remains a consistent and powerful female literary tradition, the recognition of culturally and historically specific conditions in women’s lives requires that we appropriate, contextualise, and thereby rein our recordings of individual texts” (Feminist Studies 597).

Society controls its members through its institutions. Family being the basic unit of society, marriage has been one of the fundamental and long-standing institutions of society. The rituals and ceremonies of marriage differ across societies of different race/culture. Concomitantly the role expectations of wife, mother, daughter also differ in varying degrees. Tan’s novels depict the
subordinate status of the Chinese woman even when fulfilling all these roles within society.

Marriages in China are “business deals” tells Weili to her Americanised daughter: “... getting married in those days was like buying real estate... You saw a rich family with a daughter, you found a go between who knows how to make a business deal” (The Kitchen God’s Wife 164). In China marriages were usually arranged between the parents of the prospective bride and bridegrooms when the couple were of a very young age. Tan shows this through the story of Lindo Jong in China. Lindo was the eldest daughter of her parents. When she was only two years old, a village matchmaker brought a lady from the nearby village of Taiyun. This was Huang Taitai the mother of the prospective groom. He was a year younger to Lindo when the match was settled. At the age of twelve Lindo left for her future husband’s house. The marriage was ceremoniously conducted at the age of sixteen. Unfortunately her husband was discovered to be sexually abnormal and Lindo managed to escape from the relationship using cunningness, dishonesty and histronics.

In some marriages the boy would be much older to the girl. In most cases, the girl had no choice or say before the elders who decided her life partner. She was never given a chance to reject her parents’ selections. Even when the marriage itself brought great
misery to the young wife, she was often forced to endure everything. Such was the case with Weili’s mother, who was an educated, refined lady from Shanghai. She was forced to marry Jiang Sao-yen, her father’s friend, at the insistence of her widowed mother. When Weili’s mother arrived at Jiang Sao-yen’s house, there were already five wives in the household. Soon she became the envy of the other less-educated, traditional wives. They called her “double second” and considered her position as second wife a “bad-luck-spot.” They made her life miserable, complaining if she ordered a special kind of noodle for herself, making fun of the French shoes she liked, teasing her for reading newspapers, because” they were not educated” like her. They envied her black hair saying that, that was the reason Jiang had married her. Eventually she chopped off her hair and left it behind for them to “fight over” when she left Jiang (The Kitchen God’s Wife 128).

Similarly Ying-Ying’s marriage was arranged to a man who was older than her brother and so she called him ‘uncle’ when they were first introduced at a marriage ceremony. Much against her wishes, her well-to-do parents proceeded with the proposal. Ying-Ying complied with the wishes of her parents and learned to love the man. However, very soon she discovered his immoral character and was insulted intolerably, when one day, he brought home his mistress. Ying-Ying becomes neurotic and killed the baby in her
womb, by inducing an abortion. Then Ying-Ying became "abandoned goods" (*Joy Luck Club* 248) and left the house. She was sheltered by friends and distant relatives. It took some years for her to regain her mental equilibrium. Incidentally, her second marriage to an Irish American named Clifford St. Clair proves to be a happy one. But she carries the psychological scar of her previous traumatic married life all through her life.

Tan has portrayed a number of unhappy marriages of traditional China in the pre-communist era. Most of these stories reveal the powerlessness of women in this country. Divorce being taboo in society, the miserable, battered wives often resorted to death as an escape. A story is told about a woman who resisted the marriage arranged by her parents, by hanging herself by her own hair to the roof of the sedan car, that was carrying her to the wedding place (*The Kitchen God's Wife* 127).

The subordinate status of the women is further revealed in the polygamous relationships into which these young women are forced by relatives or trapped by circumstances. In the novel *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan portrays one such character in the person of An-Mei's mother who became a victim of a seduction, which was cleverly planned by a rich merchant, Wu Tsing and his Second Wife. The young widow, had to accept her tormentor's proposal of concubinage because she is warned of scandalous talk should she
refuse. As she is a widow, and a dignified person, she pays for her gullibility by accepting concubinage. The son born to her is taken away from her and brought up as the son of the Second Wife. Wu Tsing breaks his promise of buying her a house. Driven to utter despair and self-contempt the young widow kills herself one day by consuming excess opium in the steamed dumplings, which were prepared for the Chinese New Year.

The oppression of women within families/societies is perpetuated through patriarchal indoctrinations of female subordination. The education of the women to obey the man begins at a young age through informal lessons and advices from elderly female relatives. An-Mei was taught from childhood. “not to run or sit on the ground to catch crickets.....not to cry ....when disappointed... to be silent and listen...to ....elders” (The Joy Luck Club 217). The young girls were taught the Confucian Philosophy which laid down three obediences and five virtues to be followed by women. Henry Tsai, in The Chinese Experience in America, explains the three obediences and four virtues of Chinese culture. It was meant to keep Chinese women in shackles. Confucius created this doctrine to perpetuate gender subordination in China. The three obediences were: obedience to the father, before marriage; to the husband after marriage; and to the son, when widowed. Thus traditionally Chinese women were placed under the control of the
male sex from the cradle to the grave. The four virtues were: (1) "woman’s ethics," meaning a woman must know her place and in every way act in compliance with the old ethical code; (2) "woman’s speech", meaning a woman must not talk too much; (3) "woman’s appearance", meaning a woman must pay attention to adorning herself with a view to pleasing the opposite sex; (4) "woman chore," meaning a woman must willingly do all the chores in the house. This very much resembles the Indian “Manusmriti” and is the gender role expectations for an Indian Woman.

Higher education was denied to the girls and was considered even dangerous. Most parents were wary of educated women for a wife or daughter-in-law. This is clearly evident in the accusations heaped on Weili’s mother for her progressive thinking and ultimate boldness in eloping with her boyfriend leaving behind a young daughter and a rich husband. Weili’s mother had been educated in the first missionary school in Shanghai in 1867. She was taught to resist Confucian doctrines and its subordination of women. Later, after her mother’s disappearance from the Jiang Sao-Yen household, Weili is warned by her aunt: “Wie-wei do not follow your teacher too closely. Look what happened to your mother” (Kitchen God’s Wife 122).

Betty Freiden’s concept of feminine mystique seems to operate in traditional Chinese society by inculcating in the growing
girl a desire to be a perfect cook, wife, daughter-in-law as well as mother, preferably of sons. A young girl’s indoctrination into her subordinate status and societal role would begin in childhood, usually initiated and guided by her mother, or, in her absence, by a grandmother, aunt, or any other elderly female relative. Weili and Lindo were tutored the art of being good wives by their respective mothers-in-law. Weili was told by Wen Fu’s mother:

to protect... husband so he would protect [her]. To fear him and think this was respect. To make him a proper hot soup... This is how [Weili] learned to remain a good wife to a cruel and unworthy husband, to be dutiful to a terrible person. In her childhood her aunts had each raised her to be afraid in different ways. (The Kitchen God’s Wife 207).

Similarly Lindo’s learning began at the age of twelve in her future husband’s household. Her prospective mother-in-law instructed the servants to teach her the art of cleaning, cooking, and house keeping: “teach her to wash rice properly so that the water runs clean” (Joy Luck Club 56).

When the arranged marriages fail, often due to the abnormal or wayward behaviour of the men, the women are kept bonded to the distressful relationship by patriarchal women. For instance
Peanut’s husband is discovered to be a homosexual. But Peanut is forced to live with him. After living as a “mock wife” for few years, her mother-in-law forces her “to go into hiding” for a period of five months (Kitchen God’s Wife 448). At the end of the period a new baby boy, born of another woman is given to Peanut, to be shown to the world as her own child. Peanut does not accept this baby. She suffers great mental conflicts and agonies before escaping to a home that offered shelter to battered wives. Another story is told about a pretty girl named Little Yu. She found that her husband possessed “the mind of a little child.’ He still wet his bed and cried when the wind blew too hard. He thought Little Yu was his big sister. This miserable girl was disallowed from breaking her marital vows. It is said that “the husband’s family drove her to kill[ing] herself” (451).

The sufferings and hardships of women in China as well as India is attributed as being, due to the lack of choices available to them. Bell Hooks differentiates “oppression” as being different from “exploitation” and “discrimination” which is the collective lot of American women because they have choices if inadequate ones. On the other hand, Asian women are told that they have no choices: that the oppressive condition is her lot, irrevocable and unavoidable. This is what Weili is told by friends, Hulan and Auntie Du when she talks about the physical tortures in the hands of a sadistic husband. “Every woman’s husband has a bad temper....
Your situation is no different” says Hulan. Even when Weili, one
day, shows them the divorce papers that Wen Fu had signed
angrily the previous night, Auntie Du merely exclaims “...Disaster!
Disaster!” and Hulan calmly tells her, “This is only a
misunderstanding. To night he’ll be sorry, tears of remorse pouring
down his face, you’ll see” (Kitchen God’s Wife 395). Weili’s sufferings
at the hands of Wen Fu, was so intense that even after she is
liberated and happy with another man in America she still feels
anger whenever she thinks about Wen Fu. Even after forty years,
she confesses to her daughter;

So many years gone by, and still the anger can never
come out completely...the worst was always what
happened next, and then after that...the worst was
never knowing when it would stop (Kitchen God’s Wife
397).

Weili lost three of her children in China due to the neglect
and cruelty of Wen Fu. The first two were girls, and he remained
indifferent to the tragedy. This is a typical example of the gender
bias that prevails in most Asian countries. The third was a son
named Dhanru, who also survived, only until the age of six. Apart
from these three children, Weili killed many babies “before it could
be born” and she “didn’t care” (396). This sad story of Welie/ Winnie
and her distressful situation in being denied even the right to
prevent the abuse of her body by a cruel husband, is unparalleled in Asian American fiction.

A writer, writing for his/her tribe voices the attitudes, beliefs and opinion of the society he/she is nurtured in. In the case of immigrant writers the native society and its cultural practices get narrativised. This we see in the literature produced by Tan and Mukherjee.

Patriarchal indoctrination is seen operating within Indian societies in the novels *Wife* and *Jasmine* by Bharathi Mukherjee. From her social orientations, Dimple has picked up the notion of being a perfect Sita-like wife to her husband Amit. After her marriage, she attempts to live like her role model. She allows Amit to decide what she should drink at a party, the clothes she should wear; whether she should take up a job; even select her friends. He does not approve of Ina Mullick, so Dimple is warned against developing any friendship with Ina. However, living in a western cultural environment, seeing individualism and liberalism all around her, Dimple’s inner self seeks to break away from the straitjacket of traditionalism. The conflict between two antithetical culture/selves gets played out in the frail psyche of this immigrant. It succeeds in causing a disequilibrium to the already neurotic psyche. At the end of the novel we see Dimple murdering her husband in a fit of schizophrenia. Society can be held responsible
for the tragedy of this individual’s psyche. The Indian society (Bengali Brahmin) where Dimple is born and brought up, gives her certain role expectations as a wife. Had she remained in India she would not have been exposed to a diverse value system and social practice. Her trip to America, exposes her to a completely diverse socio cultural world of pleasure, individualism, independence and liberal attitudes. But, she is constantly warned by Amit not to “become too American and wear pants in the house” (Wife 112).

That Dimple had an independent mind even before migrating to the west, is evident from her act of killing the foetus in her womb because she did not wish to “carry any relics from her old life” to America (42).

Meera Manvi in her article “Rereading Indian Womanhood” writes that by describing her protagonist “Dimple” meaning “slight surface depression,” Mukherjee makes clear her intention of projecting Dimple as a study in female powerlessness; by denying any sense of self-worth, the novelist further “underscores her as a prototype of female psychosis” – “a victim of patriarchal oppression seeking ineffectually to integrate a lost and divided self” (140). Dimple’s quest is to prevail as an authentic self against role prescriptions. But she does not succeed in redefining herself within the cross-cultural social environment. Her inability to survive psychologically, and to assert her individuality despite the
American social environment, results in the act of murder. As Rigney has suggested, "female insanity...can in a majority of cases be explained by the oppression of women in a power structured, male supremacist society." (Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel 6). Mukherjee's character Dimple is often compared to Desai's Maya in Cry, the Peacock. Both these women are of an extremely sensitive nature, and both become victims of stress, whether of the social environment or of an incompatible married life. In Maya's case it is the latter, while in Dimple's case it is both. If Maya in Desai's novel realises that marital harmony and compatibility are only Maya, an illusion, Dimple dreams that she is Sita: "a good wife,...docile...conquering the husband-enemy by withholding affection and other tactics of domestic passive resistance" (Wife 9). By willing to emigrate anywhere Amit wants to, by not allowing him to wash dishes, by not objecting to his refusal of a job on her behalf etc, she seems to be the ideal, contented wife. However, a slow change is brought about by the antithesis between illusion and reality. She soon experiences the economic hardships faced by many Asian immigrants like themselves in America. The cost of living independently proves expensive, and Dimple realises that her husband does not earn enough to maintain a high standard of living of which she had dreamed often. The painful reality pricks the balloon of Dimple's American Dream. Added to
this disillusionment, Amit's patriarchal attitude, together with an indifference to her emotional condition drives her to a rebellious state which is clearly manifested in the neglect of her wifely duties, and finally it climaxes in her murdering her own husband.

About Dimple, Alladi Uma remarks: "From the girl who wanted to give she now becomes one who also wants to receive" (Woman and Her Family 25). She begins to think of the television as her only friend; "it was so undemanding, it gave... and asked nothing of her in return" (Wife 157). Her act of murder becomes a self-assertive action showing her rebellion as well as resistance to traditional stereotypes prescribed by Amit and other Indian friends and relatives.

In another novel of Anita Desai, Voices in the City, the heroine Monisha, commits suicide after being subjected to a loveless, cold married life. She seeks release through death. This is the escape resorted to, by some unhappy wives in Tan's novels, like An-Mei's mother and Little Yu in The Joy Luck Club. While these women become martyrs of unhappy married lives, some like Lindo, escape through shrewdness, pretension and connivance. The women of the 1940's: Ying-Ying, Weili, were able to liberate themselves and remake their lives with a second husband. However, the narratives also reveal the other side of the issue; that, society has its own way of punishing these women who flee from unhappy marriages. We
see this in the trials and hardships which Weili goes through after leaving Wen Fu. She is implicated in a false charge by her vengeful husband and put into prison. Weili's mother had suffered similar scandalous talk, when she left the Jiang household to live with her revolutionary lover. Peanut is forced to take shelter in a house which later becomes a home, offering shelter to battered wives.

These narratives also depict the extreme devotion and self-sacrificing nature of the Asian women towards their husbands despite their insubordinate status. The self-sacrificing nature of the Indian-Hindu wife is well brought out by Mukherjee in *Jasmine*. Following the death of her husband after a short married life the nineteen-year-old Jasmine decides to commit Suttee on the university campus in America where Prakash had obtained admission.

This Indian custom was prevalent among ancient Greeks, Germans, slaves and their races, as pointed out by P.V. Kane in his book *History of the Dharamsastra*. Originally restricted to royal families eventually the ritual spread to the Brahmins and Khastriyas and acquired a social charisma. It also became an act of bravery and courage when Rajput women resorted to it to save themselves from being dishonoured by a conquering army. Nayantra Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* gives a realistic portrayal of an actual incident of Sati. Perhaps Mukherjee may have been
influenced by another actual sati that took place in Rajasthan in 1987— that of Roop Kanwar. Mukherjee’s protagonist however does not finally commit the act and herein lies the novel’s feminist perspective, of this ethnic reality.

In the village of Hasnapur, where Jasmine lived as Jyothi, one among nine children, she has witnessed the subordinate status of her own mother. Once, her aunt brought a marriage proposal for her and her father, keen to marry her off, is furious when her mother voices her protest and speaks on behalf of her daughter’s future academic ambitions. That night Mataji is severely beaten by her father. Jyothi comes to know about the beatings. As the narrator in *Jasmine* relates, “And deeper into that night I heard the thwack of blows...” (52).

Female insubordinations work in insidious ways in society. One of the ways it does this, is by denying the woman knowledge about her own body. This is a major difference between the western woman and her Eastern counter part. Amy Tan has captured the ignorance of traditional Chinese women in the novel *The Kitchen God’s Wife*. For instance when Weili first begins her menstruations, she is frightened and runs to her cousin Peanut crying: “somebody chopped me off.” Later when Peanut sees the menstrual blood, she screams: “Wei-Wei’s been killed ... help me ...” (227). In the absence of factual, scientific knowledge about female physiology
these girls are frightened and bewildered. They are further made to feel afraid of their body by superstitious beliefs perpetuated and inculcated by equally ignorant elderly women relatives. So when Old Aunt is informed about the ‘calamity’ she tells the girls that “bleeding [is] a sign. When a girl starts having unclean thoughts, her body must purge itself. That [is] why so much blood [is] coming out. Later if a girl marries into the proper family chosen for her, if she becomes a good wife and loves her husband [this] will – stop” (227-28). This is the reason why, when Weili becomes pregnant immediately after her marriage to Wen Fu, she remains ignorant about her pregnant condition. Instead she thinks, she has become a “good wife.” It is Hulan, senior to her by one year, who enlightens Weili about the facts of delivery—that babies did not come out “through the opening of the stomach!” Weili dismisses this as “nonsense talk” (228). Weili’s first pregnancy ends in a still-born baby. Unbearably sad at the tragedy, she believes it to be her own fault, for she had dropped scissors before the delivery. She ruminates later “They [scissors] landed with their points stuck on the floor... [She] felt something very strange. The baby stopped moving inside [her]...That’s how it happened: The scissors fell, the baby became very still” (304).

Mukherjee’s Jasmine\Jyothi is similarly naïve about reproduction and childbirth at the age of eighteen. It is her liberal-
minded husband who teaches her "Pygmalion like," to be "a new kind of city woman" (Jasmine 77). In the case of Dimple, lack of knowledge about feminine sexuality throws her into guilt and confusion when she enjoys the brief sexual encounter with an American named Milt Glassner. The married Dimple, is unable to comprehend the attraction she feels for this American. Her ethnic conscience plagues her for the moral lapse, while her body craves the pleasure she had hitherto never experienced in her marital relationship with Amit. She begins to feel her inability to live up to the ideal-wife role model of Sita. This is the reason why her brief encounter with Americanism ends in disappointment. It does not bring her the desired satisfaction. The consequent guilt and confusion, add to the depressed state of Dimple and leads to her withdrawal from the confused reality she is unable to comprehend or fit into. Ignorance about feminine sexuality, libido, and consequent frustration, leads her to seek refuge in a make-believe world of fantasy, hallucination and dreams. This is the beginning of Dimple's psychological breakdown. The Indian husband is typically ignorant about his wife's mental condition. Amit pays for this ignorance with his own life, for he himself becomes the first victim of Dimple's schizoid psyche.

In their attempts to explore the sufferings of their race, gender, and class, these Asian American novelists dwell on another
extreme form of gender cruelty: that of sexual abuse leading to seduction or rape. Mukherjee's first novel *The Tiger's Daughter*, portrays an unpleasant and traumatic seduction of the expatriate Tara by Mr. Tuntunwala. He was a flamboyant politician and an adept womaniser. She had unwarily walked into a compromising situation that had been well-planned by the cunning politician. Eventually he had thwarted her gentle attempts of resistance and "tastefully executed" the seduction even while her "maid in the corridor remained ignorant of all untoward details" (*The Tiger's Daughter* 199). Later she admits to herself sadly, that her years abroad had robbed her of her natural prudence, which *every* Indian girl imbibed from childhood: fear of male lust and anger. It is the foreignness in Tara, which makes her gullible and a victim of this unpleasant event.

Tan has depicted a similar rape and seduction in her novel *The Joy Luck Club*. It is a young, refined, gullible widow of a scholar, having two children, who is seduced by a rich merchant. An-mei narrates the incident as she heard it from her mother's maid Yan Chang. Her mother had been a widow only since a year. One day, she went to visit the Six Harmonies Pagoda in Hangchow, which was on the far side of the West Lake. During the boat journey, a lady befriended her and later invited her to an evening of mahjong. The widow accepted the hospitality. She stayed the night,
unsuspecting the evil machinations of the woman. At night the widow is subjected to a planned rape by the woman's husband, a rich old merchant named Wu Tsing, who threatens her with violence should she resist. An-Mei narrates that in the morning "she [her mother] left in a rickshaw, her hair undone and with tears streaming down her face." She told no one the truth. But the woman who had been the Second Wife had started scandalous gossip about the widow's wanton behaviour. In this situation the widow had to accept the proposal of Wu Tsing to become his "third concubine" and "to bear him a son" (237).

_Jasmine_ depicts a case of sexual violence in the life of Jasmine. The rape of the illegal immigrant Jasmine, on her first day in Florida, is typical of the trauma experienced by immigrants upon alien soil. Jasmine's tragedy is the result of her naiveness, innocence as well as ignorance about American society. The boat owner, a Caribbean, whom every one calls Half-face, is clever to exploit the ignorance and innocence of this uneducated girl from the village of Punjab. He wastes no time in satisfying his lustful desires.

The Caribbean is himself unaware of the seriousness of the crime he has committed. While for him, it is just another woman he has abused, for the Indian woman, Jasmine it is tantamount to sacrilege; for she had come to America to offer herself as sacrifice in
a ritual of Suttee. By abusing her sexually, Half-face had transgressed the purity of the Hindu widow. He is made to pay for his crime through death. Jasmine punishes her rapist by killing him Kali-like, with a knife she had picked up en route her journey, (as discussed in p 83).

Tan portrays another dimension of this extreme form of gender violence; rape within marriage. In *Kitchen God’s Wife*, Weili is repeatedly raped by her cruel husband. At first she thinks it to be a natural part of married life and she strives to satisfy all his perverted desires. However, soon his abusive sexual behaviour, pains her and she suffers from these encounters in a terrible way. One such incident takes place after the New Year dance hosted by the American officers for the Chinese Pilots. Wen Fu gets very angry to see Weili dancing with an American. That night: with a gun to her head he rapes her, telling her that since she had “lost the privileges of a wife... now she had only the duties of a whore” (304). Years later, recalling those traumatic days with Wen Fu, Weili tells her daughter Pearl: “He made me do one terrible thing after another... I did all these things until I was senseless, laughing and crying, all feeling in my body gone” (394).

Unknown to Pearl, she herself is the child of one such violent encounter that happened a day before Weili managed to escape to America. Through the story of Jiang Weili /Weiwei /Winnie, Tan
depicts the oppressions and victimisations of women in traditional China of the 1920s and 1940s. The slave like bondage of the wife to her husband and his family, is realistically portrayed in the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*. The very title, taken from Chinese culture, is about the philandering deity, called Kitchen God and is represented by Wen Fu. The faithful wife of the God is represented by Weili herself. In the mythological story the wife remains unrewarded for her faithfulness and extreme forgiveness, whereas the deity is blessed by the Gods to grant boons to the people every year. Thus Tan highlights the gender bias, prevalent in Chinese culture. However, in her novel she gives a feminist perspective of the traditional myth, by narrating the story of the woman-wife instead of the god. The story is autobiographical, as Tan has said in an interview: "The most terrible things that happened to that character in the book happened to my mother.... I left out things that were even worse" (*CBY*: 562).

In these stories about families living in China in the early twentieth century, we see the provisional status of the woman whether as wife, or mother; their expendability, fluctuating according to their family's economic circumstances or social status, or the woman's ability to bear sons. This leads to ruptured family relationships, where children get separated or abandoned by their own mothers. It is depicted in the childhood of An-Mei, Lindo, and
Weili. An-Mei is raised by her maternal grandmother whom she called Popo. Her mother, a widow was forced to become the concubine of Wu Tsing and live in his house in Tientsin. Her mother's return at the time of Popo's death, and An-Mei's impulsive decision to go with her to Teintsin, gives her few days of happiness with her mother. But soon, her mother's suicide robs An-Mei of her mother's love and she is looked after by other relatives. Lindo is sent away from her natal family to stay with her future husband's family when a flood destroys the family crops. It is her father who makes the decision, and Lindo has to comply, causing considerable pain to both the mother as well as the daughter. Lindo does not return to her mother ever again. Even when her marriage fails and she escapes from the Tai-tai household, she goes to a new country, and carries with her only memories of her twelve years existence with her family especially her mother. Weili in the *Kitchen God's Wife* is abandoned by her miserable mother when she was only six years old. The child grew up hearing scandalous talks about her mother's bold actions in eloping with a Marxist revolutionary. Weili never saw her mother ever again. For three days after her mother's disappearance, the child Weili never left the room she had shared with her mother. When she went downstairs on the fourth day, she saw funeral banners hanging on the door. She knew what it implied: her mother was dead or considered to be so, by this
household. Soon she was sent by her father to live and grow up with his younger brother's family on Tsungming Island. But many years later she confesses to her daughter in America: “In my heart, there is a little room. And in that room is a little girl, still six years old. She is always waiting, an achy hoping, hoping beyond reason...” (130). She has carried the ache within her all through these years as is expressed in the following words she speaks to Pearl. “And so, even to this day I still feel I am waiting for her to come back and tell me why it was this way” (102).

It is in answer to their own ruptured families and relationships that these Chinese women construct stories of bonding with their mothers. Speaking from their mother loss, these immigrant mothers, An-Mei, Lindo, Weili offer an altered version of the “romance of the daughter.” They tell their daughters that they shared deep bonds with their own mothers in words, which these youngsters can never comprehend. In this way, remarks Marina Heung Ying-Ying, An-Mei, and Lindo narrate consoling tales of a “fantasy of symbiosis with the maternal” (Feminist Studies 603). Recalling her first sight of her mother, after a long separation, An-Mei describes how their gazes locked them into instant identifications, “her mother looked up. And when she did, [An-Mei] saw [her mother's] face looking back at her” (Joy Luck Club 45). The night her grandmother Popo lay dying, An-Mei saw the extreme
bond of love between a daughter and her mother when she witnessed a painful sacrifice performed by her mother to cure her ailing grandmother:

[Rose-Mei] saw her pull up her sleeve and pull out a sharp knife. She put this knife on the softest part of her arm. [Rose-Mei] tried to close her eyes, but could not....And then her mother cut a piece of meat from her arm. Tears poured from her face and spilled on the floor... mother took her flesh and put it in the soup...she opened Popo's mouth....she fed her this soup (48).

The Chinese mothers are anxious about their relationship with their Americanised daughters. The otherness of the daughters' hybridized self makes it unlikely for the Chinese American mothers to establish deep matrilineal bonds with them. Marina Heung's opinion is that: "The burden of differences in personal history and cultural conditioning is too great" (603). Ying Ying voices this ambiguous relationship:

...I love my daughter, she and I have shared the same body. There is a part of her mind that is part mine. But when she was born she sprang from me like a
slippery fish, and has been swimming away from me ever since" (*The Joy Luck Club* 242).

Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orback are of the view that the closeness between mothers and daughters are strong in societies where patriarchy subjugates women:

Traversing the generation from grandmother to mother to daughter is a particular psychology that has its roots and its flesh in the experience of being female in a patriarchal culture (*Understanding Women* 38).

Theories in cultural anthropology supported by archeological evidences reveal that regions in the Mediterranean and Middle East were once inhabited by matriarchal societies that worshipped a mother Goddess. Matrilineal traditions existed in these societies. It also records matrilineal traditions being prevalent in societies of Africa, India and China. Though these countries followed a patriarchal social structure matrilineal \ matrilocal traditions came to be preserved through successive generations of maternal relatives. The mothers in Tan's novels have enjoyed such close ties with their mothers in China that they are unhappy and upset about the lack of communication between themselves and their American-raised daughters. Cultural diversity has caused a tension in the traditional mother-daughter relationship. The American born
daughters are ashamed of their ethnic mothers. Waverly is very embarrassed when Mr. Rory comments about the remarkable physical resemblance between Waverly and Lindo. Lindo is “ashamed” that her daughter is ashamed of her mother, while the mother was “proud” of her daughter (Joy Luck Club 255). Ying-Ying has also experienced similar indifference and lack of respect from her daughter Lena. She has resolved to rectify it by telling her daughter about her ethnic heritage; “It is the only way to penetrate her skin and pull her to where she can be saved” says Ying-Ying (242). We see the same tension expressed in Meridian written by Afro-American writer Alice Walker. Walker’s Meridian does not agree with her mother’s views on life and, as years go by, they grow apart from each other. Yet she cannot break away from her mother. She clings to her mother’s letters. In this context Peter Erickson remarks that, the mother is that ‘past’ which cannot be ignored. Similarly Tan’s younger generation Chinese Americans are unable to cut off the intangible bonds, which bind them to their mother. The mothers become a link to their ethnic heritage; a bridge between past and present.

Generational conflict and tension is explicit in the relationship between Suyuan Woo and her daughter June. Henry Tsai in his book The Chinese Experience in America attributes this conflict as being the outcome of the gap between parental
expectation and child performance existent in Chinese American families. Henry Tsai notes that the Chinese upbringing demands high achievement from the children, failing which there is anger and sadness on the part of the parents. Again, this can be explained as the ethnic reaction to racist stereotyping. The first generation Chinese immigrants, having suffered from racist policies and discriminations wish to prove themselves through their children. Therefore they impose a strict discipline upon their children, involving great diligence and perseverance. Lindo’s extreme pride at her daughter becoming the Junior Chess Champion in the district is to be understood in this context. This is also the reason behind Suyuan Woo’s overwhelming desire to make a prodigy out of June. Unfortunately, the American-born children are unable to understand their parents’ ambitious attitude in the alien country. It is this lack of understanding, caused by cultural/generation gap that leads to harsh words and actions between mothers and daughters in Tan’s novels. For instance, when Suyuan reprimands her daughter for not being adequately motivated to perform excellently, June shouts at her: “Why don’t you like me the way I am ? I am not a genius!....” June is immediately slapped by her irate Chinese mother and told: “Only two kinds of daughters... those who are obedient and those who
follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live-in this house. Obedient daughter” (*Joy luck Club* 142).

The Chinese mothers see daughters who “grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English” (40-41). To the American daughters ‘joy’ and ‘luck’ do not mean the same thing. So the Chinese American mothers are anxious that their ethnicity will be erased by time and a diverse cultural environment. They are frightened that their grandchildren will be born “without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation” (*Joy Luck Club* 41). When they came to America fleeing hardships in China, they had wanted their children to have the best of both combinations: American circumstances and Chinese character. But when they perceive the cultural and generation gap between themselves and their daughters, they realise that the twain shall never meet.

Cultural diversity however, cannot break the strong hold of ethnic traditional practices and beliefs. This is shown by the various ways in which the Chinese mothers attempt to influence their daughters’ decisions and attitudes in America, through ethnic cultural wisdom, stories, narration of histories and personal experiences. This has been affirmed by Alladi Uma in her book *Women and Her Family*: “The mother is culture bearer; no matter
how diverse... the daughter is unable to reject her completely" (66). The older women in Tan's narratives attempt to remind and instil ethnicity into their daughters through Chinese myths, legends and religious, superstitious beliefs. An-Mei tells Rose one day: “All of us are like stairs, one step after another...all going the same way.” An-Mei had wished Rose to grow up stronger than her mother and grandmother. But when she falls into depression, following her divorce from Ted Jorden, An-Mei realises that her daughter “came out the same way” like her mother and grandmother (Joy Luck Club 215). Similarly Waverly is taught the “art of invisible strength” by her mother at the tender age of six. This enabled her to win arguments and to win in the game of chess. She discovered from her mother that “for the whole game one must gather invisible strengths and set the endgame before the game begins” (Joy Luck Club 94). In this way Waverly became the junior Chess Champion of the district at the age of nine. Unfortunately generational, cultural conflict and misunderstanding make her react to her mother's pride in her achievement. It leads to a confrontation between them, one afternoon, while they were shopping for groceries in the Chinatown of San Francisco. After the incident, Waverly discovers that she has lost her magic gift to win in the game of chess. The hurt she gave her mother, was in some strange way responsible for this loss. It becomes symptomatic of their future relationship. All
her life later, Waverly is unable to escape from her mother's ability to make her see black where there was once white.

Tan seems to be making a statement through these stories—that in order to survive in the new alien country, making the right choices, these daughters need to establish a connection with their ethnicity through their mothers. For it is the mothers who embody ethnic culture in America. This has been found affirmed in African literature also. According to Andrea Rushing "A theme throughout African literature depicts the woman as guardian of traditions... who stands for security and stability" (19). Tausif Sultana in her essay, remarks that Black Motherhood is seen as not only giving birth to and bringing up children, but also as igniting in them the "creative spark" and transmitting in them "cultural heritage" (IJAS 36).

Every society gives primacy to motherhood as an important experience for women, and imposes the role of mother upon them as their proper identity. It is interesting to see how Tan and Mukherjee deal with the institution of motherhood in their specific narratives. Mukherjee does not seem to be overtly interested in depicting mother daughter bonding as Amy Tan does in her novels. Perhaps it can be attributed to the difference between their ethnicities. It reflects on the social cultural differences of both
writers: Chinese culture being matrilocal, matrilineal, within a patriarchal power structure.

The stories offer a juxtaposition of the traditional mother who willingly suffers for her children and family, example Mataji (*Jasmine*), Suyuan Woo in *The Joy Luck Club*, Weili in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, with the strong feminist woman-mother who acknowledges her individuality within her maternal function. Examples of this are Weili's mother (*The Kitchen God's Wife*)-Louise Kenfield (*The Hundred Secret Senses*), Jasmine (*Jasmine*), Jess (*Leave It To Me*), and Rebecca Easton (*The Holder of the World*). In the portrayal of these two types, the writers also present two dominant and contrasting images of the woman: as destroyer and preserver. We see women (would be mothers) like Dimple, Ying-Ying, Weili who murder unborn babies in their womb as an act of rebellion to patriarchal role demands. In Dimple's case, the desire to start a new and prosperous life in America motivates her "to force a vile thing out of hiding" by skipping her way to an abortion (*Wife 30*). To Ying-Ying, the foetus becomes repulsive when she discovers the immoral side of her husband's nature. For Weili, the termination of unwanted pregnancies is an act of mercy - killing because she does not wish to subject her children to her unhappiness and misery as Wen Fu's wife. In these feminist portrayals, motherhood is critiqued, as we see mothers who are
unlike the stereotype sweet self-sacrificing woman one usually comes cross in conventional literature.

In such feminist portrayals, Tan and Mukherjee rank with Black Women novelists like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker who in *Sula* and *Meridian* respectively, do not present the stereotype mother, but depict mothers who reject motherhood under stressful circumstances. These humane portrayals reveal the distressing situations, which the woman is subjected to in her role as mother. Tan narrates one such story in *The Joy Luck Club* through the voice of June. The opening section of this novel introduces the sad story of June’s mother who was forced to abandon her twin babies on the roadside during the Sino-Japanese War. The story is poignantly told about Suyuan Woo's journey from Kwelin to Chungking, with all her belongings and her babies in a wheelbarrow:

Finally there was not one more step left in her body. She didn’t have the strength to carry those babies any farther...She slumped to the ground. She knew she would die... She took the babies out of the sling and sat them on the side of the road, then lay down next to them. 'You babies are so good,' she said, 'so quiet.' They smiled back...And then she knew she could not bear to watch her babies die with her...she stuffed jewellery under the shirt of one baby and money under the other.
She reached into her pocket and drew out the photos of her family... And she wrote on the back of each the name of the babies. ... without looking back she walked down the road, stumbling and crying, thinking only of this one last hope that her daughters would be found by a kind-hearted person who would care for them (282-83).

The difference in the attitude of the Chinese mother who is forced to abandon her daughters during a wartime contingency, and that of Louise, Jess, and Rebecca who neglect or shirk their maternal duties in order to indulge their individual preferences reveal that ethnic woman—whether African or Asian gives more importance to motherhood than her white counterpart. This is further exemplified by the subsequent efforts made by Suyuan to trace these twin daughters even decades after the tragedy. From America, she maintains a continuous correspondence with her friend in Shanghai. She finally succeeds although a bit late; for her friend’s letter carrying the address reaches the Woo family two months after Suyuan’s death. Among all the mothers, only Louise Kenfield, Rebecca, and Jess are white. The others, Suyuan Woo, Lindo, Ying-Ying, An-Mei, Mrs. Arati Banerjee, Mataji, Mrs. Basu are mothers who take their role very seriously, often with tremendous hardship to themselves. Louise Kenfield, Jess, or
Rebecca, do not trouble themselves too much regarding their maternal duties. Louise gladly surrenders her maternal responsibilities to Kwan her stepdaughter, after her arrival in America. Jess abandons her baby daughter in the wild forest near Devigaon village during a night of music, drugs and frenzied dancing. In this novel Leave It To Me the baby girl is Debby, who is later rescued by nuns from a convent in Devigaon and given for adoption to a family in America. Debby, is obsessed with discovering her bio-mum, although it is not motivated by any mother-daughter bond. On the other hand Debby is filled with hatred for the parents, especially her mother who had "left her to be sniffed at by wild dogs, like a carcass in the mangy shade" (10). All these women, Jess, Rebecca and Louise are unable to establish maternal bonding with their daughters. Similar, though in lesser degree, is the dislike of Hannah for her mother Rebecca who left her, a young child of four, to go with her Nipmuc lover. Hannah has never spoken about her mother to anyone. It is only after Hannah’s departure from India, along with her own daughter Pearl, that she decides to return to her mother’s land. In Rebecca’s case, she had abandoned her only daughter to the dangers of a warring tribe in the deep wilds of Massachusetts Bay colony that was at that time going through a political crisis between the native Indian Nipmuc inhabitants and the English colonials. It is a maid who saved
Hannah that fateful night, and brought her to the Filtch household where she grew up and remained until her marriage to Gabriel.

In comparison to the European mothers, we see a typical mother from Hasnapur village in Punjab portrayed by Mukherjee in *Jasmine*. Jasmine's mother Mataj endures physical beatings to wrest from her patriarchal husband, the permission to allow Jasmine to continue her studies, instead of marrying her off at the age of thirteen. The novel also depicts mother as preserver. For instance, Jasmine happily carries within her, Bud's child, even when she decides to leave him and go with her lover Taylor. Again Weili does everything she can to save her baby daughters from their father's cruelty. In the depiction of motherhood, Tan and Mukherjee seem to offer a feminist rethinking of the institution of motherhood. Instead of the patriarchal models of contented, happy mothers some of these mothers show indifference towards their children at some point in their lives. It is a humane portrayal.

In immigrant writings, the past is connotative of ethnicity and a denial of the past can imply a denial or rejection of one's ethnicity. Mukherjee's novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* deal with the women-immigrants who have severed bonds with the past ethnicity. By marrying David Cartwright Tara has opted for assimilation into dominant culture. Her seven years life in America, with a Caucasian husband, has estranged her from her own ethnic
beliefs and rituals. She realises this on being unable to follow the prayer rituals with her mother in the family prayer room during her visit to India. She admits to a "cracking of the axis and center" at that moment (51). In Dimple's case, estrangement from her ethnic past consequent upon her migration to America is intentional. It is part of her preparation to become American. It is also the reason why she induces an abortion of her first pregnancy in India: "she did not wish to carry any relics from her old life; given another chance she could be a more exciting person, taking evening classes perhaps, become a librarian. She had heard that many Indian wives in the States became librarian" (Wife 42). But when her life in America becomes increasingly distressful, she worries about her inability to dream about Calcutta. She shares her fear with Amit. Ironically, the Indian male is unable to grasp the mental condition of his wife. He ignores her pleas and drives her to greater despair and distress by his chauvinism and orthodoxy. Perhaps, if she was surrounded by relatives and friends, providing a support system, as in the case of Tan's Chinese Americans, she would not have suffered a psychological breakdown. Her relationship with her mother is not strong enough to make her long to return to India and the family; although she does consider the idea, once she begins feeling mentally disoriented. Another of Mukherjee's protagonist, Jasmine, exhibits an over enthusiasm to sever all
bonds with the past and to reposition her stars for the future. In this novel also, we see an immigrant (Jasmine) casting herself adrift from familial ties once she reaches America. Her very decision to migrate to America, after becoming a widow, shows her wilful desire to sever all ties from her home and her folks in Hasnapur. At no point in her later life as an American citizen, does Jasmine experience a yearning for her homeland or family, least of all her mother. In the case of both these Indian-Hindu women, the past denotes ethnicity, orthodoxy and stereotype role, while the present holds the promise of infinite possibilities, individualism and liberalism. Their rejection of the past is therefore a statement of their desire to remake and redefine their personality in the new social cultural environment. They achieve this, although in varying degrees and patterns, as is seen at the conclusion of the novels – *Wife, Jasmine*.

Asian American as well as Afro American literature depict grandmothers as mother surrogate – provider / protector / nurturer / life giver, and sustainer / endurer. Age and experience distinguishes them from the mothers. It gives her a sense of power and authority. She has passed the stage where her role as wife could intrude on her maternal functions. In Tan’s fiction we see them in characters like Popo, An-Mei’s maternal grandmother in *The Joy Luck Club*, Old Aunt and San Ma in *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, Big Ma in *The
Hundred Secrets Senses. These women are important for the stability and dependability they symbolise to the young girls they nurture. Though none of them support the family economically, they protect their 'grand children' from evil and parental wrath. This is poignantly captured in the portrayal of An-Mei's maternal grandmother Popo, who takes care of An-Mei after her widowed mother has to go to live with Wu Tsing in Tientsin. These older women give themselves entirely to their charges, infusing in them a sense of their own selves and that of family. They become transmitters of tradition and culture; for they are themselves custodians of culture. Tan's older women/grand mothers find parallels in African American writings. Pilate in Morrison's Sula and Aunt Jimmy in The Bluest Eye are examples of grand mothers who become surrogate mothers to their grand children. It is also found in Indian writings such as Aunt Mira in Anita Desai’s Cry the Peacock, Dodamma in Markandya’s Some Inner Fury, or Alamelu in Two Virgins. However Mukherjee’s novels do not dwell on this important substitute of maternal love.

Another significant feminist concern thematised by Tan is the issue of female bonding among Chinese women. The traditional Chinese mothers, Suynan Woo, Lindo Jong, Ying-Ying, Weili, Helen, Peanut, Kwan, have all benefited from friendships with women in their lives. Friends, aunts, sisters, acquaintances, all of them
women, have helped these characters at crucial moments of their lives. There is the example of Suyuan’s friend in China, who very sincerely helps her to locate her lost daughters. The joy luck aunties believe that, after more than two decades, “Suyuan’s dead spirit...guided her Shanghai school mate to find her daughters” (Joy Luck Club 286). Lindo seeks the help of a servant girl to escape from an unconsummated marriage with Tyan-Yu. Both women gain mutually from this agreement; freedom for Lindo and legitimacy for the servant girl’s baby; for otherwise she would have ended her dishonoured life tragically.

The very success of the Joy Luck Club in San Francisco is an example of the bonds of friendship and solidarity existent between first generation Chinese American women. The club was first started in China during the Sino-Japanese war. It was born out of the common wartime hysteria and paranoia shared by women, whose husbands were fighting a losing battle with the Japanese Army. It was formed on the basis of a Chinese superstition that, despair would attract tragedy; therefore to pretend joy and cheerfulness would bring luck and happiness into their hopeless lives. Four women gathered together every week to play mahjong, eat, talk, joke and be merry for sometime. The club naturally broke-up, when the members got separated from one another by tragedies. Years later, its founder Suyuan started a similar club in
San Francisco in nineteen forty-nine in commemoration of the former one. The unity and loyalty of the club members is representative of the Chinese American community. These women have remained close to one another in America. Their solidarity has been a source of strength and help to their families. For instance when Suyuan Woo dies before having fulfilled her cherished dream of visiting China to see her daughters, the club aunties pool in sufficient money (three thousand dollars) to enable June and her father to undertake the trip. When June expresses her reluctance to meet her half-sisters, she is coaxed, and persuaded by the Joy Luck aunties, to go to China and establish her connections with her siblings and thereby establish links with her ethnic ancestry. In this way the club lives up to its tradition of providing joy to its members amidst sorrow. Just as it made the women in China laugh and forget the impending fear of a possible Japanese invasion; in San Francisco, the club has helped these Chinese Americans to remain confident and proud of their ethnicity. The Chinese food specially made for the occasion, adds to the ethnic ambience created with the talk, the jokes, and the tales told by the aunties. The weekly meeting of the club becomes the center of their life in the new country. It serves to establish their ethnicity and comradeship in dominant Anglo-American society.
In *Kitchen God’s Wife*, Tan portrays female bonding through the fruitful relationship between Weili and Peanut, as well as Weili and Helen. Weili and Peanut are cousins, and Weili always helps the younger sister in many ways. For instance, she carries love letters written by Peanut to her boyfriend at great risk to herself. It is the same boy who later brings a marriage proposal to Weili after coming to know about her rich father and the possibility of a handsome dowry. At the end of this novel Peanut repays, the kindness by helping Weili to escape from her battered life with Wen Fu. Peanut introduces her to Little Yu’s mother who consoles Weili and helps her to carry out successfully her escape from her traumatic marriage. During their growing years Peanut and Weili used to call each other “Tang - je” meaning sugar sister. (*Kitchen God’s Wife* 446).

This novel describes another such relationship between Weili and Helen. Weili met Hulan/Helen in China during Sino-Japanese war of 1930’s -40’s; their husbands were pilots of the Kuomintang army. Since that time both have lived through very difficult days, and been of much help to each other. Tan describes a particularly moving incident that throws light on the integrity and sincerity between such friends. One day, while Weili and Helen were shopping in the market place in Nanking, the Japanese airplanes arrived, driving the crowd into uncontrollable fear and hysteria. In
the ensuing melee, Wieli lost her friend and got pushed about by a crowd caught in the grip of fear of imminent death. Weili was at that time seven months pregnant. She was pushed down to the ground and managed to escape death by turning over on her side. Suddenly, Hulan appeared in a taxi cab she had managed to grab from a thief. She rushed Weili home to safety. Weili always felt obliged to Helen for this help. She repaid this and other deeds of benevolence by sponsoring Hulan as her sister-in-law after emigrating to America. Weili's sponsorship helped Hulan and her husband to come to America and become prosperous like the other Chinese immigrants. Although, Weili admits to having great differences of opinion on serious matters with Hulan; yet there is an eternal bond between them which she describes to Pearl:

She is not related by blood, not even by marriage. She is not someone I chose as my friend. Sometimes I do not even enjoy her company. I do not agree with her opinions. I do not admire her character. And yet we are closer perhaps than sisters, related by fate, joined by debts. I have kept her secrets. She -- has kept mine. And we have a kind of loyalty that has no word in this country (82-83).

It is significant that the bonds of kinship and friendship prevalent among first generation Chinese Americans is absent in
the second generation. This is brought home to the reader by the portrayal of strong friendship between the Joy luck Aunties juxtaposed with the unfriendliness and envy which exist between the daughters of these mothers, despite the fact that they have lived and grown up together in America. June, Waverly, Rose, and Lena do not share the bonds of closeness which characterise their mothers' relationship with one another. The envy and jealousy between Waverly and June is evident in this sarcastic comment offered by the former when the latter gives a poor piano performance. "You aren't a genius like me," Waverly tells June matter-of-factly. Years later, June admits that she had wanted to pull Waverly's braids and punch her stomach on hearing this (Joy Luck Club 140). With Lena, June feels that even though they were friends, they "have grown naturally cautious about telling each other too much... what little they say to one another often comes back in another guise" (38).

Mukherjee's novels depict similar friendships of a deep, platonic kind between Hannah and Bhagmati in The Holder of the World. In this relationship between two women of different class and race, it is perhaps, the peculiar character of Hannah which makes the friendship grow between a European mistress and her Indian maid. Unlike the stereotype English women, Hannah does not harbour any racist attitude towards the Hindu woman; on the
other hand she makes use of the opportunity to gain knowledge about the culture and beliefs of the Indians. Bhagmati regales her with stories from the great Hindu epics: *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha*, about Lord Ganesha. She saves her mistress twice from death. The first time is when a communal riot follows in the wake of interethnic killings among Hindus, Englishmen, and Muslims. Disguised as a Hindu woman, Bhagmati, smuggles the sari-clad Hannah through the rioting streets and reaches her to the safety of king Jaydev Singh’s Palace at Panpur. Later, during the siege of Devgad, Bhagmati again helps Hannah to flee. But unfortunately this time Bhagamti is killed and Hannah is left to face her fate alone in the Emperor’s harem.

In all other novels of Mukherjee, the protagonists are mostly lone characters; for instance there is only passing friendship between the Indian immigrant, Tara and her batchmates at Vassar, or in Calcutta. Similarly, Dimple’s friendship with Pixie in Calcutta and Ina Mullick in America fail to develop into the kind of meaningful kinship ties existent among Tan’s first generation Chinese immigrants.

Gender and ethnicity also inform the narratives of Asian American women writers, in the complex ways the ethnic woman translates or transforms her identity in the new world. The contradictory forces: of acculturation-assimilation on one hand, and
ethnic separatism on the other hand becomes problematic in the identity formation of Asian American women. Since Asian women, like the Blacks, are twice marginalized; they encounter racist-sexist problems more than the Asian American male. Ethnicity is an inerasable factor in forming the selfhood of an ethnic in an alien country. Women proverbially function as the preservers and transmitters of culture more than the male, in her role as the homemaker in the family. It is the mother who is often the perpetuator of the cultural heritage in the family or community. Therefore, the Asian women in America encounter more problems and difficulties than her male counterpart. This is reflected in the tensions suffered by the mothers in Tan's novels. It is they who, more than their husbands, express anxiety about the erasure of ethnicity through culture loss in their American born daughters. They seek to rectify the same by telling them stories and legends about China.

We find that the degree and the method of transformations of the ethnic identity differs across culture and across generations. In comparison to the second generation, the first generation Chinese immigrants are more closely bound to the homeland and their ethnicity through letters, photographs, memories, and through the practice of religio-cultural beliefs in the New country. Some of them, like Lindo Jong acknowledge, that the migrations to America
followed by her immigrant status has given her a 'double face'—One American, the other Chinese (Joy Luck Club 266). Lindo also realises that though her daughter Waverly is a product of two cultures, her cultural mixing is different from her own; "Only her skin and hair are Chinese. Inside - she is all American made" (254). It is the otherness of the daughter's hybridised self that makes it unlikely for the mother to achieve perfect identification with the daughter. This dualism in the identity as a result of their biculturalism is a characteristic feature of coloured women in America.

The need to effect changes in the identity, so as to suit the changed social environment becomes imperative in the case of second generations ethnics - June, Waverly, Lena, Rose, and Pearl. It is they who eventually map out a third category of immigrants: the hyphenate, semi-assimilated ethnic who remains both ethnic and American. This is the new breed, who, according to Mukherjee are rewriting the history of America. They are the pioneers who are remaking a new nation in the New Country. Mukherjee's character Jasmine is the best example of such a citizen in a multicultural society.

"Translation" emerges as the new metaphor in the second half of the twentieth century in the U.S. In analysing the galaxy of female characters in the novels of Tan and Mukherjee, it is
interesting to see how far and how successfully each one has achieved the acculturation-assimilation-hyphenation within themselves, in other words, how far have they ‘translated’ their personalities/self-hoods to suit the new milieu. Among the daughters in Joy Luck Club, June and Waverly have achieved a greater degree of self-confidence in their dual status. Lena on the other hand, despite having an American father, is diffident and apologetic about her Chinese looks. She is constantly worried that her husband will think she is “sham” and “dirty,” even though her friends have repeatedly extolled her “exotic” looks. Similar feeling is shared by Rose, who, is in “therapy” because her “marriage has already fallen apart.” Rose has also affirmed this anxious feeling to be commonplace among Asian women. (Joy Luck Club 156)

At first Olivia Bishop, daughter of a Chinese American male and Russian American female prefers to be known by her mother’s ancestry. In fact she is quite ashamed by the arrival of her Chinese half-sister Kwan who is called a “Chink” by her friends. (The Hundred Secret Senses 10). But Kwan slowly yet surely familiarises Olivia with her paternal ethnic heritage by telling her stories and events about China. Kwan sometimes even lapses into Chinese language. Eventually, ethnicity overcomes the conflict in Olivia’s mind, and she opts to acknowledge and celebrate her Chinese ancestry by adopting her father’s name of Li. She christens her
daughter Samantha Li, and establishes a generational continuity with her Chinese parentage.

Mukherjee's women characters differ in the degree of their transformation vis-à-vis migration. Tara does not resolve her dual affiliations even at the end of the novel. Despite her marriage to a Caucasian, Tara is unable to achieve this mature actualisation: in America, she is homesick for India, while, in India, she experiences a foreignness of the spirit (*The Tiger's Daughter* 37). In Dimple's case, her migration to America with her husband is a much dreamt of event, for which she has been preparing since quite sometime. She even kills the foetus in her womb in preparation for her American life sans any "relics from the past" (*Wife* 42).

However, once in America, Dimple is ill-equipped culturally or psychologically to accommodate into the western socio-cultural milieu. Ethnic ethos intrudes into the consciousness of this woman who has a strong tendency to be wilful and independent. This is evident in the guilt she experiences after a sexual encounter with an American friend. In Manhattan, Dimple wishes to be like Ina Mullick, liberated and westernised in every way. But she meets with disapproval from her husband who does not wish her to become "too American." Dimple being mentally frail and, emotionally insecure, falls victim to conflicting cultural expectations. She withdraws into depression, which soon develops into schizophrenia.
According to Gayatri Spivak, Dimple's action of killing her enemy, instead of herself, as is the regulative sociology for Indian woman, reveals the new selfhood germinating within her after her exposure to American society. Instead of committing suicide, which is what most Indian women would do under the circumstances; by killing Amit, Dimple exhibits an assertive personality, which hitherto has been a victim and not the aggressor. In this way Dimple's struggle "to evolve into a whole new entity ends in catastrophe" (Critical Perspectives 56). Mukherjee's Jasmine is different from Tara and Dimple for she has the ability to change herself according to the need and demand of the hour. If Mukherjee's women, succeed in finding their distinctive voices (Jasmine, Hannah, Debby), it is only after battling insolently with their own stereotypical images and the images of their self which they wish to translate into. Before migration, these women have had to fight another battle: the acquisition of their female identity resisting conformity to traditional stereotype image. Jasmine and Hannah manifest their feminist streak by refusing to allow their widowhood to confine and restrict their individuality. Both of them flower into interesting women: Jasmine as an American citizen changing names and lovers and Hannah, following her basic instincts and becoming Salem Bibi to King Jaydev of Panpur, Devgad. Although, Jasmine initially undertakes the trip in order to sacrifice herself through a religious
ritual of suttee, in America, her encounter with Half-face, effects a transformation in her character and personality. At the beginning of the novel *Jasmine*, the protagonist is Jyothi which means 'light' in the Hindi language. Just like her name, Jyothi is visible but apparently unheard. Her aunt, her father, as well as her elderly relatives, all unite to fashion out her life according to their decisions. She begins her life as a silent woman, foretold by the village astrologer of her widowhood and exile (*Jasmine*). Jasmine's preconditioned voice is trained by her husband Prakash to argue and fight, to want for herself. This lesson she imbibes well into her life and it helps her to survive in an alien country. Prakash's eighteen month stay with this village girl from Jullander, empowers her with speech as well as a thirst for the unknown, less travelled roads. With Prakash's death, Jasmine's Odyssey into self-exile, and illegal entry, begins the telling of the speaking person's tale which is one of struggle, despair, violence, wonder and transformation. In this way Jyothi, the silent woman, transforms into, 'the speaking person' teller of tales. From a pious Hindu widow and a rape victim Jasmine emerges an avenging female killer who defies male authority \ lust as well as the patriarchal demands of Hindu social systems, which advocated sati for the devout Hindu wife. The impulsive or instinctual murder of her rapist does not trouble this immigrant or fill her with guilt or remorse. Jasmine's religious
beliefs absolve her conscience of all guilt concomitant upon an act of murder. At no point in her later years, do we find her being haunted by remorse or fear of retribution. The incident, changes her from a victim to a destroyer, a survivor and an American. From then on Jasmine changes her name- Jase to Taylor, and Jane to Bud Ripplemeyer.

Mukherjee’s women protagonists at some point feel obliged to make their choice between ethnicity and Americanism\ modernism. Finally it is not the traditional role that the women reject, but the fact that they can no longer reconcile the traditional models to their circumstances. This is exemplified in the story of Hannah. Sometimes, the ensuing frustration arising out of their inability to evolve a new, alternative model, drive these women to react with violence upon those with whom they live or upon their own self. This is illustrated in Dimple.

Both Tara and Dimple end their lives tragically, without achieving the maturity of self-actualisation and assimilation. If Tara gets caught in a communal riot, Dimple loses her sanity. Both therefore suffer a kind of erasure from society. Jasmine’s individuality, however, survives both: death as well as migration. Hannah also escapes death in Brokefield, before reaching India as wife to Gabriel Legee. By grasping at the dream which the new country offers, the respective women find it imperative to put to
death most of their past, original self. Hence Jasmine’s rejection of a sati-like death or; Hannah’s rejection of widowhood as a puritan Christian in India \ Salem, are indicative of a survivor individuality. Both women allow a complete reconstruction of their identities to suit the new country and culture.

Diane Moon Soutter in her essay “Mukherjee’s Jasmine: Exile, Refugee and Nomad” has aptly summed up the multiple identities operating within this single individual. She writes: “as Jyothi, she is a child bound by her native rural culture; as Jasmine she becomes a cultural refugee with a developing sense of self; as Jane, she is a nomad in hiding” (37). According to this writer, it is the rape and murder which severs Jasmine from the mental construct she has been carrying with her from her old culture; from the childhood as Jyothi, to the Jasmine engaged in a myth project of committing suttee on Prakash’s burning clothes. Stripped of her cultural imperatives, Jasmine enters the world of the complete refugee. Initially an exile, who is forced to flee her native village due to societal pressures and taboos surrounding widowhood, Jasmine becomes a refugee after her rape and consequent murder of the rapist. As a refugee she follows a nomadic existence “adrift in a world of reckless happenings with no cultural structure to guide” (40). In the act of killing, Jasmine explodes her former identity; cuts herself from cultural moorings, she is lost, without inner structure,
except her memory. From a refugee she becomes a nomad, Kali intervenes to change her life and to create a new being who survives against all odds in America. Mukherjee's protagonist in *Jasmine* thus evolves from the fate-driven woman who wished to commit suttee, to the Jasmine/ Jase "scrambling ahead of Taylor, greedy with wants and reckless from hope" (*Jasmine* 214).

In Hannah, one sees the American or western counterpart of Jasmine. She too changes from the puritan, simple, foster child in the Filtch household, to the wife of a sea-farer and adventurer, Gabriel Legee; later as the Salem Bibi of a Hindu king, and finally to the harem of the great Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Hannah makes transitions across cultures; puritan, Christian, Hindu, Muslim. She changes her appearance by donning attires suitable to the identity she chooses. For instance after becoming the mistress of a Hindu King Jaydev Singh, Hannah is seen dressed in sari, khol-eyed, hair braided, garland of fragrant flowers decorating her hair just like any other Hindu woman. When she joins Aurangzeb's harem, she appears gaudily dressed, with grand clothes, bejewelled, leaving a trail of fragrant smelling perfume.

Hilde Hein in her work *Women, Knowledge, and Power* remarks about the role of spirituality in the cultural construction or representation of the woman: "Spirituality.... Is a natural force attendant upon woman's materiality and closeness to nature. The
control and domination of women who harbour this spirituality are therefore essential to the survival of patriarchy” (300). The novels of Tan and Mukherjee make use of this patriarchal convention. In the Hindu religious mythology, there exists potent female goddesses – Durga, and Kali which Mukherjee evokes in her novels *Jasmine*, *Leave It To Me*. The worship of these goddesses during specific festivals marks the deification of woman, not as a transcendent being, but as the incarnation of natural processes whose rhythms must be respected and whose rites observed. The fecundity of woman, like fecundity of Nature, came to be reckoned with, even feared, but above all to be husbanded and controlled like any natural resource. Woman thus becomes a repository within which that force resides. On this account, spirituality was not denied of woman; instead it became equated with her materiality.

Patriarchy from the beginning has continued to pay grudging and ambivalent respect to the subterranean forces of life and passion that are viewed as woman’s spirituality. Benevolently represented these forces empower women as healers and comforters. Woman are herbalists, alchemists, nurturers, and bringers of solace and repose. Kwan in *The Hundred Secret Senses* is a popular herbal doctor and alchemist among traditional Chinese Americans living in San Francisco. She also possess the gift of the hundred secret senses, by which she can communicate with the
spirits of people dead and living, near and far away. Jasmine in Mukherjee's novel by that name, is 'care giver' to Taylor, Wylie and their daughter. She becomes a live-in-companion to Bud Ripplermeyer even after his accident that cripples him and confines him to a wheel chair. Jasmine also shows maternal affection towards the Vietnamese son named Du, who has been adopted by Bud. She shares with Du the rootlessness of an exile in an alien country.

Spirituality when malevolent makes women agents of diabolical powers as witches, seductress, and murderers. This is depicted by Mukherjee in the novel *Jasmine*, when Jasmine turns 'Kali - like' and kills Half - Face. At that moment, the spirit of the goddess seems to enter into the person of the abused Hindu widow and impel her to take revenge for the wrong done to her.

Still another representation of spirituality distinguishes it from both matter and the realm of intellect and places it in a pseudo-morally refined dimension of sentiment. Here spirituality is domesticated. The home, that is also the domain of women enshrine spirituality. According to the doctrine of "separate spheres," the home is the sanctuary of the spirit, and there the woman presides. From her pedestal she relieves the harsh reality of the lives of men, and indirectly she dispenses an inspiriting influence upon the
public sphere by softening the harshness of the men to whom she ministers. Barbara Walter in her essay argues that men are governed by reason and occupied with material concerns from which women have been largely excluded, but men are also the chief beneficiaries of women’s spirituality. This is best seen in the character of Tara’s mother, Mrs. Arati Banerjee. She judiciously performs the ritualistic worship of the Hindu gods every morning in her prayer room in Ballygunj. Deities are bathed, garlanded and decorated before beginning the chanting of hymns and prayer recital. Afterwards she distributes the sacred prasad to the other worshippers. Tara often found solace in recollecting the picture of her mother, seated in a prayerful posture in the room, during the days of homesickness in America. The spiritualising role of women is thus a socially stabilising force. Feminists find this attribution of spirituality to women a means of subjugation and imprisonment of the woman while utilising the spiritual capacity as a device for the maintenance of social order.

While from a woman’s perspective, the comparative social esteem of being regarded as a font of spirituality may be preferable to being burned at the stake as a witch, the calibre of spirituality involved is somewhat truncated and ultimately degrading. ‘Far from the romanticised ‘at-oneness’ with a transcendent spirit from which it is alleged to stem, this hearth-bound spirituality is miniaturized
and manicured" (Women, Knowledge, and Power 302). The little mother is all sweetness and depicted as such in countless sentimental works of literature and art. No sign is apparent of the ferocity and bitter calculation that often mark genuine maternal concern. Nor are violent tremors of sensual passion allowed to mar the serene face of spirituality that romantic patriarchy ascribes to women. The sentimentally spiritualised woman is removed from the rough traffic of life. She is above the crass materialism and rationalism of the world of men. Mrs. Arati Banerjee in the The Tiger's Daughter exemplifies this.

The novels under analysis make use of the binary opposition of male and female in terms of the dichotomies prevalent in the universe: of light and shade, day and night, permanence and change. As the moon lady in The Joy Luck Club sings man is 'yin' meaning light / day while woman is 'yang' meaning darkness/night. As a result of such polarising the woman is attributed with possessing qualities such as dark, change infinite, night, emotions. Aristotle was emphatic upon the nurturent role of woman and considered her a passive receptacle who nurtures life while man was the active agency of the spirit which generates life. This doctrine makes woman morally deficient. Biologically and metaphysically deficient she lives at the level of matter where her moral and social aspirations are ascendingly fixed. Aristotelian
doctrine is seen reflected in Confucian philosophy as well as Christian doctrines. The narratives under consideration depict this patriarchal perspective and simultaneously critique it through subversions and paradigm shifts as for instance, the actions of ‘Sita like’ Dimple, or the reactions of ‘Kali – like’ Jasmine.

The novels written by Tan and Mukherjee are representative of feminist writing in Asian American fictions. In their choice of theme, plot, structure, character, they voice feminist concerns and perspectives; they expose the oppression of women engendered by patriarchy across countries and cultures. Marilyn French states that all feminist literatures necessarily depict patriarchy; but it does not underwrite its standards. That is the reason, these writings even while depicting patriarchy as destroying a character or a world, “does not approve of the destruction” (Hypatia 69). Both writers exhibit sensitivity to the cultural construction of their gender. In their fiction we see a good cross-section of Chinese and Indian women, living in America - the translations effected by Asian women in America and the need for change in identities in multiracial, multicultural social environment such as that of America.
NOTES

1Hilde Hein in her essay "Liberating philosophy" taken from Woman, Knowledge and Power refers to this doctrine which argues that matter is woman and spirit is man. Women or 'the feminine' is the hostage to this transcendent spirit. Intuitive and feeling, they are nonrational: nurturant, and caring, and not purely material. This doctrine came into prominence in the nineteenth century and is still deeply embedded in patriarchal mythology.