CHAPTER V
LITERARY AESTHETICS

Werner Sollers in his essay “Literature and Ethnicity” states that ethnicity has been a pervasive theme in all American Literature. The very forms of American Literature have been partly shaped by the forces of ethnicity. From the first emergence of Americanised genres (letters, travelogues, memoirs) to the highest achievements of the American Renaissance, from the opposition of “romance” and “novel” to the rise of modernism and proletarian writing, from the growth of a mass culture to the literature of alienation and to the writings of the recent ethnic revival, ethnicity has informed and existed both as sociological tool as well as literary aesthetics.

According to Fredrick Karl, “minimalist writer must assure the audience that he, the writer knows far more about the subject than he is including...” (American Fictions 1940 - 1980 384). These writers depend on “echoes, mirrors, images based on reflection, and doubling become like a ‘second voice’ in the novels” (385). Both
Mukherjee as well as Tan deploy the literary strategies of minimalist writings in order to give expression to their double bind aesthetics.

The ethnic writings of Asian American writers Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Jade Snow Wong, Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, and others are replete with their ethnic culture: story, character, atmosphere, background, and language. Both Tan, as well as, Mukherjee have been read for the ethnicity pervading their literary self-expressions.

Reading Asian American novel as an analogue of the European novel subordinates Asian American culture in several significant ways. In privileging a nineteenth-century European genre as the model to be approximated, Asian American literature is cast as imitation, the underdeveloped other. David Palumbo-Liu asserts that immigrant literature should be read / taught as “ethnic bildungsroman as a tale of the subject’s journey from foreign estrangement to integrated citizenship” (The Ethnic Canon 55). Werner Sollers terms such stories assimilationist narratives because they move from “shallow assimilationist to reborn ethnic” (Beyond Ethnicity 32). The novels of Tan and Mukherjee can be read as ethnic bildungsroman because they characterise the tales of Asian American protagonists who come to America with dreams of happiness and prosperity and find themselves victims of exploitation, violence, marginality and incarcerations; and by
perseverance and sheer will, adapt and survive in the alien country. The story of Suyuan Woo, Lindo Jong, An-Mei Hsu, Weili, Pearl, are examples of successful and prosperous lives lived in America. Juxtaposed with these successful stories are the stories of Rose Jorden, Lena St.Clair, Dimple, and Tara who suffer ethnic discrimination, racism and become victims of culture collision. This paradox that America offers its immigrants: the security of a promised land and the cruelty of Hell are the two opposite faces of America. On one side is the national fiction of democratic nation-state without sorrow or suffering, and on the other side exists a nation in which members of that national body barely survive owing to exclusion from that nation state. Thus the proclamation “We are America” does not represent an identification of the immigrant subject with the fiction of inclusion. The ending of such novels of migration is according to Palumbo-Liu an uneven divided notion of America. The manner in which Asian-American literature refuses the reconciliation of Asian immigrant particularity is illustrated in the novels of Amy Tan and Bharati Mukherjee. Other examples in this genre are Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter*, John Okada's *No-No-Boy*, and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*. Whereas, in the male bildungsroman we see a movement from “the world without to the world within,” from the adventure tale to the confessional novel; we see in fictions of female development, a movement from the world
within to the world without, from introspection to activity. This is the story of the Chinese American women in Amy Tan’s fiction. The first generation immigrants from China, of the 1920’s and 1940’s leave their homes, families and children to make a new beginning in America. Often the life left behind is too traumatic for their well-being. Almost all the women—Wei Li, Helen, Lindo, Ying-Ying, are examples of this female bildungsroman. Nevertheless, their narratives differ from the western genre such as that of Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, Willie Cather’s *A Lost Lady*. There the female protagonists who simultaneously awaken to inner aspirations and social limitations end their lives through death, thus bringing an end to the inner development. In these twentieth century Victorian novels, death is a kind of containment of female revolt, revulsion or risk. Death is the price exacted for female awakening, whether explicit as in Chopin novel or implicit as in George Eliot’s *Mill On The Floss*. In the postmodernist narratives, however, death does not come to the female protagonist; on the other hand she outlives the man who causes her misery, sometimes, by killing him as in the case of Dimple in *Wife*, Jasmine in the novel of that name, or Maya in Desai’s *Cry The Peacock*. These women writers therefore, become writers of the postmodernist feminist novels of female bildungsroman, which is more aptly termed ‘novel of survival’ or
'novel of awakening' to a new realisation, although asymmetrical and schizoid. Tan's tales of female bildungsroman about ethnic women differ from that of Mukherjee, in that, the Chinese women after coming to America, enjoy freedom, individualism, and limitless opportunity. They survive old world hardships and live a life of peace and stability in the new country, where they adapt to the changed circumstances and raise families. Thus the genre undergoes changes when employed by Asian immigrant writers.

Tan as well as Mukherjee succeed in rewriting the female bildungsroman through their culture specific experiences. Tan's protagonists, Suyuan Woo, Weili, Lindo, Ying-Ying, unlike Madame Bovary have been seasoned and strengthened by tribulations in their native country. They have suffered in every way for, America too, has given them a fair share of trouble through racist policies, ethnic discrimination and sexist attitudes, yet, these women have learned to survive. In this, they can be compared to Mukerjee's heroines, Jasmine, Hannah and Debby. It is to be noted here that, even though the ethnic narratives of Asian American women writers follow the paradigm of migration and transformation, they are different from the conversion stories of Classic ethnic American literature where the protagonist gets converted from an un-American past to an American identity. The autobiographies of Mary Antin, The Promised Land, Edward Steiner, From Alien To
Citizen, are some examples of this genre. Compared to this, the contemporary Asian American assimilationist narratives do not relinquish past ethnicity; on the other hand, they seek to achieve a transformation, which accommodates two cultures that DuBois terms "double consciousness". Diana Chang calls this "bifocalness" of identity, in her talk given at the MLA Convention in New York in December 1976. Elaine Showalter calls women's writings "double-voiced discourse that always embodies the social, literary and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant" (Beyond Feminist Aesthetics 263). According to Amy Ling, Americans in the "hyphenated condition" live constantly trying to balance on an edge, "now slipping over to one side of the hyphen, now climbing back only to fall down the other" (MELUS 7.4.69). This divided or schizoid self, illuminated in Marilyn Waniek's, "The Schzoid Implied Authors of Two Jewish Novels" cannot but be apparent in the works of hyphenate writers. Thus opines Ling, "even if a writer does not write of her own ethnic background, focusing instead on characters from the dominant culture, she may nonetheless reveal not necessarily her own ethnicity, but the fact that she is not totally or unequivocally part of the dominant" (69). This we find manifested in some of the writings by Mukherjee, such as her recent novel Leave It To Me. According to Thomas J. Carabas, "the uniqueness of many of Mukherjee's stories . . lie in the[ir] reversal, even denial of
the standard narrative about the assimilation of immigrants to America" (*Literary Half Yearly* 51).

In an essay titled "Mukherjee's *Jasmine*" the critic Leard calls the novel a "unique form of a Hindu bildungsroman, where the body is merely the shell for the inner being's journey towards a more enlightened and empowered subjectivity" (*Explicator* 114). Mukherjee shapes her heroine as a "fighter and adapter" (*Jasmine* 40) who is perpetually in the process of remaking her self and her destiny. The novelist employs the image/motif of the broken pitcher for *Jasmine*, to symbolise the temporality of one's life journey within the ongoing Hindu cycle of rebirth. It also stands for the fragility of constructed boundaries, whether of the self, the family, or the nation, Jasmine's difficult "Odyssey" (101) to America and her initial experiences in an alien society parallel the emergence of a new selfhood despite the vulnerability of her youth and material circumstances. Even her "defilement" (117) does not end in the traditional ending of all rape victims, that is death. On the other hand she is infused with the destructive energy of the goddess Kali, and murders her rapist who symbolises the "underworld of evil" (116) and begins a new "journey, travelling light" (121). Beneath the careful distancing of past tragedies lurks a woman who cannot free herself from the collective memory of her haunting past. Having lived through "hideous times" (214) Jasmine in her arduous journey
of survival has accomplished the rare mission of transcending the boundaries of unitary self and identifying with all the nameless victims of her gender, culture, class and imperialism. Mukherjee brings the narrative to close on a note of optimism. Jasmine "cocooning a cosmos" (224) in her pregnant belly, and about to "reposition her stars" again (240), is ready to plunge into life and another journey of transformation. Mukherjee's ethnic Hindu bildungsroman is further continued in her novel *Leave It To Me*, in the story of Debby Di Martino, a Eurasian character who is a product of American liberalism, the hippie cult of the 1970's and the benevolence of strangers. Debby is rescued by some benevolent nuns who also arrange her adoption to an Italian American family. In this way Debby travels from Devigaon as a baby into the hands of foster parents in America. Mukherjee's novel opens with this American girl of twenty travelling in a Corolla car, changing names, boy friends, and destinations.

Journeys are evidently an effective metaphor for imagination and aesthetic experience, as well as 'soul - making' or self - development. This has been witnessed in writers like Jean Rhys, Edith Wharton, Katherine Mansfield, Jane Bowles, Margaret Atwood, Doris Lessing, Djuna Barnes, Bharati Mukherjee, Amy Tan, among others. For the writers of the Asian Diaspora, passage can mean a journey from old world culture to a new socio - political
scenario. Mukherjee's *Jasmine* for instance, has Jyothi undertaking a dangerous voyage to a 'mysterious' world of America in order to fulfil the duty of a devout Hindu wife. But the journey becomes a kind of bildungsroman for Jyothi who becomes Jase, and Jane, according to the changing circumstances. At the end of the novel Jasmine is seen "scrambling ahead of Taylor greedy with wants and reckless from hope" (214).

Travel is also a metaphor for the passage from sanity to madness as we see in Mukherjee's novel *Wife*. At the novel's end we find the protagonist wife, schizoid and a murderer. Her novel *The Tiger's Daughter* explores the metaphor of travel to express the passage from naivety to experience as Tara leaves her comfortable hearth at Calcutta and goes to study at Vassar, New York. Tan's novels employ this device to mark the transition of the immigrant personality from sorrow, hardship and oppression to one of individualism and American freedom. For the Chinese women Lindo, Ying-Ying, Winnie, the journey becomes a passage of liberation from an unhappy past to a better existence in a new country. At the end of Tan's *Joy Luck Club* the writer/immigrant uses travel to reestablish links with an ethnic ancestry / kith and kin. Though June Mei has never seen her twin step sisters before, her first sight of them in China, brings home to her with surprised shock the uncanny resemblance between the different generation
of women in the same family – Suyuan Woo (mother) and her American born daughter June Mei and her Chinese daughters. In *The Kitchen God’s Wife* the journey to China is implied at the end of the novel. Winnie / Weili plans to go to China with her daughter Pearl to visit old places and people and to collect herbal medicine for Pearl. In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, the journey becomes a revelation for Olivia, the half – Caucasian immigrant. She is persuaded to undertake the trip to China by her step-sister Kwan. Once there she acknowledges her links with the past - both of ancestry and existence. It is after her epiphany-like experience in the mountain village of Changmian that she changes her surname to Li which was the name of her Chinese father. Until then, she called herself Olivia Kenfield \ Bishop. She also accepts the truth about her previous life as Miss Banner.

Most Immigrant writings are autobiographical; written in the first person narrative (I) or semi autobiographical, introducing a narrator. The preoccupation with this genre by women writers is interpreted by bell hooks as the technique of “talking back” (*Talking Back*), wherein the “unauthorized” subject women, with unspeakable experiences disrupts the history and tyranny of the universal subject ‘man’ in literature. Terry Eagleton in his *Literary Theory* notes that “certain meanings are elevated by social ideologies to a privileged position, or made the centers around
which other meanings are forced to turn”(131). The meaning of the western selfhood was one such meaning of privilege in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. According to Sidonie Smith “this history of the universal subject thereby underwrites a history of the female subject” (Subjectivity, Identity, Body Intro xvii). “Technologies of gender” to use Teresa de Louretis’s phrase in the book of that title, hypostatise an ideology of sexually marked selfhood in the nineteenth century. To the women is attributed another kind of selfhood different than that of the universal\male subject. The role of woman must necessarily surrender to the embodiment of her race as procreator and nurturer. It is against this background that writers such as Woolstencraft, Woolf among others began inscribing their gendered self in literary endeavours, thus cracking the conventionally designed hard nut of the universal subject. This same dynamics functions in the literature of the minorities. In this context, the writings of the ethnic women, the ‘excluded’ become a means of talking back. For, the official histories of the subject remain vulnerable to the destabilizing strategies of the “others,” who have been inexactily excluded and identified as carnivalesque or grotesque. As Susan Stanford Friedman suggests, they enter precisely because they experience “alienation from the historically imposed image of the self culturally assigned them” (The Private Self 41). When these subjects enter the scene of
autobiographical writing, they engage dialogically with the cacophonous voices of cultural discourses, which Bakhtin calls productive and unpredictable heteroglossia. These discourses affect various technology of subjectivity by means of which autobiographical subjects dislodge hegemonic discourses of the universal subject. Moreover, coming out of a complex experientially based history of gender, race, class, nationality, religion or ethnicity; to engage official histories of the subject, the autobiographical subject does not speak from one overdetermined position within the web of discourse. Each autobiographical subject becomes what Lee Quinby labels "multiply designated," severally situated within diverse, sometimes congruous, often competing, even contradictory discursive fields. This multiplication of speaking position according to Paul Smith "increases the possibility of resistances through a recognition of the simultaneous non-unity and non-consistency of subject-positions" (Discerning the Subject 118).

James Craig Holte in his essay states: "autobiography makes the individual the source of authority" (MELUS 9.2, 30). Another reason for the popularity of this genre is attributed to the feeling of the rootlessness experienced by the ethnic community. The autobiographical writings of immigrant writers offer illuminating insights into the subject's position vis-à-vis society/sociocultural
environment. The preference for "I" especially by Tan in her novels can be interpreted in the words of Sidonie Smith "as being the resistance of the Other to an anonymous, opaque, collectivity of undifferentiated bodies" (Subjectivity, Identity and The Body xvii).

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* are written in the first person narrative 'I'. Tan's ingenuity as a literary writer, rests in her ability to begin the different stories narrated by the mothers and daughters in the same first person. The Bakhtian hetroglossia, resulting from these multiple voices give the text its multiple consciousness. All the sixteen stories in *The Joy Luck Club* are narrated in first person. Only the perspective changes as the speaker changes. For instance, at the beginning of the novel in the first story sub titled 'Jing Mei Woo' Jing Mei begins her narration in the following words: "My father asked me to be the fourth corner at the Joy Luck Club I am...." (19). The next section is titled 'An-Mei Hsu:Scar' and the narrative begins thus: "When I was a young girl in China, my grandmother told me.." (42). In this chapter, the narration is done by An-Mei. The third chapter titled 'Lindo Jong:The Red Candle,' the story of Lindo as narrated by her. Similarly in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the narration is started by the daughter Pearl in the first person. After the third chapter, the narration is taken up by her mother Weili, also rendered in the first person. Weili's story continues till the penultimate chapter, when
the narrative voice returns to Pearl. The novel ends with the voice of Pearl. Tan's third novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* also employs this multiple voices/consciousness pattern using first person.

Mukherjee's *Jasmine* has a single narrator. The novel is sometimes narrated in the first person narrative voice, at other times narrated in the third in the voice of an omniscient narrator. The shifting positions nevertheless deal with a single subject Jasmine. However, another novel *The Holder of The World*, uses multiple narrators- Beigh, Hannah, Bhagmati, Hester. This novel is cleverly crafted to enable two plots to run simultaneously - the narration of Beigh and the narration of Hannah. Towards the close of the novel, Bhagmati assumes the person of Hester and narrates the story. The multiple voices, expressing many layered subjectivities, and multiple consciousness is characteristic of ethnic writers and it is a literary device that contributes to the work's aestheticism. The monotony of the single consciousness is broken.

The strong autobiographical element pervading the fiction of Tan and Mukherjee is characteristic of the confessional, testimonial narration, often embarked upon, by ethnic women writers in the U.S. It is a result of the painful existences and experiences through which they traverse in the process of immigration into the new land. The heroines created by Mukherjee -- Tara, Dimple, Jasmine,
Hannah and Debby show glimpses of the writer's own life and predicament. The cultural ambivalence of Tara, the nomadic life of Jasmine, or the adaptation strategies employed by Jasmine and Hannah, as well as the concept of deterritorilisation advocated by the exile in Debby and Hannah are different aspects of Mukherjee's fluid, flexible personality. She tells Edward Said in an interview:

My background is a series of displacement and expatriations which cannot ever be recuperated. The sense of being between cultures has been very very strong for me. I would say that's the single strongest strand running through my life; the fact that I am always in and out of things, and never really of anything. (Criticism in Society 128).

The Janus-like figure of the door man which opens the novel The Tiger's Daughter is a kind of metaphor to describe the writer's detached observation on the goings-on in Culcutta. Like Mukherjee, the doorman of the Hotel Catelli Continental is the unobserved observer who watches the lives of the people who pass through his doors.

Like the doorman, the writer too stands at the threshold, involved with her equivalent of the Catelli-Continental, her art, as the real world of violence,
poverty and angry energy goes on around her, as exposed but also as invisible as he is (CRNLE 112).

Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, Amy Tan’s *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, *The Joy Luck Club*, Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*, *The Tiger’s Daughter*, are some of the autobiographical writings by Asian American writers. These novels explore female subjectivity through this genre. The life and experiences of both Tan and Mukherjee can be glimpsed in their novels. Like the protagonist in *Wife*, Mukherjee too hails from Ballygunj in Calcutta. During the eight years that she lived with her parents in a joint family, Mukherjee was a “wavy-haired” “narrow-shouldered child,” afflicted often by “sick headaches” which were often induced to escape into the privacy of their family bedroom. Mukherjee writes in *Days and Nights*:

I loved my headaches. . . I added to that a love of vomiting, of slipping a long delicate finger over the rough-grained tongue and down the silky, fleshy walls of throat and gullet until I was rewarded by an arc of fluid which I watched splatter against the rusty grid of the old fashioned bathroom drain (222).

This is reminiscent of Dimple’s obsession with vomiting in the early part of the novel *Wife*. Like Jasmine, Mukherjee also, sees her life in three disproportionate parts: till the age of eight she lived in the
typical joint family, "indistinguishable" from her Bengali Brahmin
girl cousins. From eight till twenty-one she lived as a single family
with her parents "enjoying for a time wealth and confidence." Since
twenty-one she has lived in the west. "Each phase required a
speculation of all previous avatars; an almost total rebirth" (179).

Serious ethnic literature besides being linked to an opposition
to stereotypes, also makes claims for realism and authenticity.
Sometimes they are even read as sociological documents of a society
at a particular period of time. Fidelity to reality, taken up for literary
representations is a major criteria for these novels. Sau-Ling
Cynthia Wong among other critics have termed the fiction of Amy
Tan quasi-ethnographic. Bharati Mukherjee’s novels and short
stories portray Asian Indian life in a truthful manner. Her writings
especially the short story collection: Darkness and The Middleman
are notable illustrations of the writer’s adeptness at portraying
ethnic reality. Especially painful is the topic of racism and the title
‘Darkness’ is a reference to racial prejudice, “which is after all, a
darkness of the mind toward the darkness of another person’s skin”
(Reworlding 55).

The realism, which pervades the writings of most ethnic
writers is an important criteria in their socio-literary agenda. To
achieve this, these writers make use of plot, structure, character,
language. In this way they recreate his/her ethnic world from the
Making use of non-literary disciplines, they achieve a literary feat of inscribing the ethnic as subject and part of mainstream life-society-literature. Mukherjee's works depict violence: both physical and psychic violence are portrayed as a result of racism practised upon the Asians in Canada as well as America. Her short story "Tamurlane," (Darkness), and her novels The Tiger's Daughter, Wife, and Jasmine depict violence in the immigrant's life.

Realism is best manifested in the language of the narrative. Both writers show a congruity towards character-conversation style. For instance Tan renders the speech of the first generation Chinese immigrants in the "broken," "fractured" form used by these non-fluent English speakers. Tan confesses to have achieved this effortlessly as it was the kind of the language she had grown up hearing in her home and her family ("Mother Tongue" 196).

A conversation between Kwan and Olivia, whom she calls Libby-ah, is rendered in the broken English variety. But this does not in any way undermine the innate wisdom and knowledge that is revealed in the speeches of the first generation immigrants. " 'Do you know what heart sickness is?'... 'Its warming your body next to your family, then having the straw roof blown off and carry you away' " (Hundred Secret Senses 12). Kwan explicates the meaning embedded in these words to Olivia. It had been the experience of
Kwan who had suddenly lost her father when he “caught the disease of too many dreams. He could not stop thinking about riches and an easier life, so he became lost, floated out of their lives, and washed away his memories of the wife and babies he left behind” (12).

_The Joy Luck Club_ and _The Kitchen God’s Wife_ are written in the same prose style. The fractured non-fluent variety of English rendered through the character, abound in wisdom and philosophy which is universal and practical. For instance Ying-Ying wishes to tell her daughter Lena, that her on going marriage with Harold Livotny is doomed to fail. She has discovered this after coming and staying with the couple for a week when she sees them living on a credit-debit account basis. Every penny that was spent by the husband or wife was written and accounted. Being a typical Chinese mother she does not waste words in telling the truth to her daughter. One day a frail vase kept on a shaky table, falls and breaks down. When Lena comes to the room on hearing the noise, her mother calmly tells her:

‘Fallen down’... she doesn’t apologize. ‘it doesn’t matter,’ I say, [sic] and I start [sic] to pick up the broken glass shards. ‘I knew it would happen.’ ‘Then why..don’t stop it?’ asks my mother. And its such a simple question.

(_Joy Luck Club_ 165)
This conversation about a simple accident, although rendered in broken and ungrammatical English, becomes a metaphoric dialogue between the mother and the daughter on the issue of the married life wherein, the mother shows impatience with her daughter's misery and indecisiveness. A description of the devastations caused by Sino–Japanese war is thus described "... A few buildings smashed down, and all the houses around them still standing, only their straw roofs gone, like hats blown off in a big wind" (Kitchen God's Wife 371). This kind of metaphoric language lends aesthetic appeal to Tan's narrative style.

It is to be noted that Tan uses a fluent English language for the speech of the American born-daughters. Even so they speak simple English in order to be comprehensible to their Chinese mothers. Tan's prose style is replete with Chinese words and phrases punctuated with interjections and exclamation marks. Almost all her characters have Chinese names for which Tan writes the glossary into the text. This practice is followed by Tan throughout her fiction. For instance Bao-Bao is the name of aunt Helen's son and it means "precious baby" (Kitchen God's Wife 5); Jing-mei consists of two words – Jing meaning "good left over stuff when you take impurities out of something like gold or rice or salt – just pure essence;" Mei meant "younger sister." (Joy Luck Club 281). Suyuan refers to "long cherished wish" (280), and Tang jie was
“sugar sister” (Kitchen God’s Wife 190) and this was what Weili and Peanut called each other.

Apart from Chinese names for her characters, Tan has also used Chinese Cuisine in the original language. Sau-ling Wong terms this “markers of authenticity” whose function is to create an “oriental effect” According to Wong in the essay, “Sugar sisterhood” they act as gestures to the “mainstream readers that the author is familiar with the kind of culturally mediated discourse they are familiar with and have come to expect from Tan” (187). It is for these Chinese details for which Tan’s fiction has been praised by reviewers: “dazzling because of the world it gives [us].” The word “tapestry” is used to describe this effect of intricacy and richness of Tan’s first novels. Palumbo-Liu rightly observes: “The power of literature over sociology lies in particularization and it is in details that The Kitchen God’s Wife excels” (The Ethnic Canon 183).

The narrative style of the Indian American novelist differs from her Chinese American contemporary by virtue of the difference in the culture and generation. In Days and Nights she confesses her political/literary position as that of a postcolonial, writing with a distinct colonial inference. For this first generation Indian American, the prose style in her fiction has evolved from post-colonial to the American vernacular. Her first novel The Tiger’s Daughter is written in “a sedate style and has a rather British feel to
it" (Span 35). Here she has used omniscient point of view and plenty of irony. This was the result of the author's convent education in Calcutta together with influences from models like Emily Bronte and E.M. Forster. By the time Mukherjee wrote *Darkness*, she had adopted American English which was highly suitable for short story writing because the "short form requires.. to express.. thoughts precisely and not waste a single sentence or detail' (Mukherjee, 'Immigrant sensibility' 35).

It is in the use of irony that Mukherjee was attracted to another Indian expatriate writer V.S. Naipaul. "Like Naipaul" she says "I used a . . self-protective irony" (*Darkness* 2) for writing about migration, expatriation, and assimilation. The style par excellence of the expatriate is irony, as is so clearly shown by Naipaul. Exploring what she calls "state-of-the art expatriation" Mukherjee deployed this strategy because it allowed her "detachment from and superiority over those well-bred post colonials . . . adrift in the new world, wondering if they would ever belong" However, after 1984, her stay in the U.S. and her self-development from the "aloofness of expatriation" to "the exuberance of immigration," marks a distinct change in her sensibility and style (*Darkness* 3).

Despite Mukherjee's admiration for Bernard Malamud, whom she earlier imitated in her theme and subject, her works exude the aura of her Bengali, Indian, Hindu imagination and this ethnicity
renders her different from the Jewish immigrant, and gives her novels an aesthetic appeal. For Malamud, coming from a monocultural Jewish background, the ghettoization and racism is consequent upon the anti-Semitic sentiments prevailing the world over, as also in the U.S. Mukherjee's fiction, born from her Hindu imagination on the other hand, fashions for her, a world of alternate realities and multiple identities as is best exemplified through the character of Jasmine, Hannah, and Debby.

Mukherjee admits to her change in the style of writing as she becomes increasingly Americanised with each passing year. Her second collection of short stories titled the *Middleman and Other Stories* has "an energy that fiction from other cultures seem to lack" (*Span* 33). Each character and story in this collection suggests a different style. The distinction, which Mukherjee has achieved today is that of having mastered the "adroit adaption of the American vernacular". Her characters in the short stories (*Middleman*) speak the contemporary idiom used by immigrants in America—"each richly reflecting the cadences of their original language on which they have grafted a new, distinctively regional Americanese" (*PW Interview* 46). The fidelity to language, as suitable to the character is carried to an extreme level in her most recent novel *Leave It To Me* that revolves around the life of a half-American character Debby DiMartino, who is the most Americanized
character created by the novelist. Mukherjee's art of ventriloquism that aids her to pick up unconsciously nuances and varieties of language, has enabled her to talk like a native of whatever region she is in at the moment. Her marriage to a Canadian-American writer Clarke Blaise, has according to Mukherjee, gone a long way to help her acquire a style which would otherwise be denied to an Asian immigrant. The monotony of language is broken as her works spring into life in the specific time and milieu in which it has been written/produced. Having lived through lot of events, worlds and momentous situations Mukherjee admits to prefer a compressed style putting in a lot of things in a single sentence. Her stories are about immigrants who have "lived through centuries of history in a single lifetime." According to Mukherjee, "what [they have] assimilated in thirty years has taken the west ten time that number of years to create" (New York Times 1988 Sept. 28). That is why her novels are fast moving, packed with events. As she tells Sybil Steinberg in the Publishers Weekly Interview: "Mine is not minimalism, which strips away, but compression, which reflects many layers of meaning" (Publishers Weekly 46).

The ethnic writers mainly resort to the realistic mode of narration because they deal with life experiences and people. These writers are concerned with giving an inside view of their ethnicity as well as ethnic reality. Tan's novels can be called examples of social
realism, for its depictions of ordinary, everyday reality, with attention given to the unpleasant and sordid aspects of human lives. She adheres to the realist tradition in fiction as defined by Raymond Williams in his essay "Realism and the contemporary novel:"

The society is not a background against which the personal relationship is studied, nor are the individuals merely illustrations of aspects of the way of life. Every aspect of personal life is readily affected by the quality of the general life, yet the general life is seen at its most important in completely personal terms (Twentieth Century Criticism 584).

The stories of Chinese women, their household chores, their hardships during wartime, their ordinary existence in society are all effectively captured by Tan. Her novel The Hundred Secret Senses contains elaborate description regarding the indigenous method adopted by the Chinese in laundering clothes. For instance, chapter five, of this novel is titled 'Laundry Day.' In this chapter, Tan gives details of household chores through Kwan who as Nunumu, the servant girl had, to do all the chores in the Ghost Merchant's House. On the first day of the week she did the washing, the second day she ironed the clothes; third day was for polishing shoes and mending clothes; fourth day she swept the courtyard and
passageways, and the fifth day was for mopping the floor and wiping the furniture in God's House (67). There is detailed description about the laundry, which was done in the passage way just outside the kitchen (69). This novel also contains tips on preserving ducks eggs (154), making Chinese broth from chicken pieces, herbs and raw blood from the killed chicken (239). The descriptions of war hysteria in Kwelin, Nanking, are rendered in simple poignant narration with clarity and lucidity. Even when rendering realistic descriptions Tan's language becomes lyrical, with colourful imagery and felicitous expressions. As for instance in The Kitchen God's Wife, Weile describes a room in her house on Tsungming Island. It was a porch enclosed from the legs to the bottom with a wire mesh: Here and there she still could see the broken remains of mosquitoes and dragon flies stuck to the mesh, their wings flying in the breeze like torn rice paper (139). The power of Tan's informal language can be illustrated in this passage were Ying-Ying recalls, how when her first husband left her years ago in China

I opened my bedroom window, even on cold nights, to blow his spirit and heart back my way. What I did not know is that the north wind is the coldest. It penetrates the heart and takes the warmth away. The wind gathered such force that it blew my husband past my
bedroom and out the back door. I found out from my younger aunt that he had left me to live with an opera singer (The Joy Luck Club 247).

Tan’s eye ranges from the exotic: mountain peaks like “giant fried fish heads” (22), to the homely- “bunk beds with “scuffed, splintery ladder.” She suggests unwritten scenes with a single detail, as in Waverly’s reminiscence of her ex- husband with “One hundred forty six straight black hairs on his chest” (174).

Tan’s skill for particulars and details has earned her works the added commendation of being called “quasi-ethnographic” discourse. Tan has adopted a stance of mediating her culture to non-ethnic readers, by her knowledge of ethnic culture displayed in her fiction. Wong calls this “quasi-ethnography about the Orient” (The Ethnic Canon 188). This attention for authenticity is further extended, to a peculiar prose style developed by Tan, which has the effect of announcing the ethnicity of the speakers. Wong further remarks: “The preponderance of short choppy sentences and the frequent omission of sentence subjects are oft-used conventions whereby-the Chinese can be recognized as Other” (188-89). In addition to these Tan employs, subtle, minute dislocations of English syntax and vocabulary to create an impression of translation from the Chinese. For example, in Ying-Ying’s recollections of her childhood trauma at the Moon Festival, an old
woman's complaint about her swollen foot takes this form: "Both inside and outside have a sour painful feeling" (Joy Luck Club 71). The inappropriate, grammatically wrong English appears only when the mothers are speaking with their daughters. Elsewhere when telling their own stories, they are given a different kind of English, fluent if simple by Tan's design to better articulate their subjectivities, do full justice to their native intelligence and restore them to the dignity they deserve.

Tan is preoccupied with the literature of the domestic mainly concerned with family; while Mukherjee focuses on the lives of Asian immigrants in American society, where some of her protagonists are seen to be struggling in a culturally hostile social milieu. Some of them survive, some become victims of psychological maladies. In this way Mukherjee explores the psychological dynamic operating within the immigrant expatriate paradigm. In The Tiger's Daughter, Wife, Jasmine and The Holder of the World, we are given insight into the mental makeup of the protagonist: their conflicts, dilemmas, fears, desires, and aspirations. Mukherjee chooses to do well largely on the feminine subject in her novels. The life of the Asian immigrant is realistically portrayed through the lives of the Basus and the Sens in America. Mukherjee's narrative style, fits into the realist traditions due to a "particular apprehension of a relation between individuals and
society...” (Twentieth Century Criticism 584). Perhaps Mukherjee’s deployment of the genre of Gothic novel can be read as an offshoot of psychological realism. Mukherjee’s novel Wife makes use of this unique style which though originating in medieval settings, is in its contemporary usage extended to a brooding atmosphere of gloom and terror representing events that are often macabre or uncanny or melodramatically violent, verging on aberrant psychological states.

Recently, this has come to be popularised by feminist writers who consider Gothic fiction as a mode of revealing results of the suppression of female sexuality in a patriarchal society. Feminist critics like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (The Madwoman in The Attic), Julian E. Fleenor (The Female Gothic) have analysed the way this fiction challenges the sexual hierarchy and values of a male-dominated society. Claire Kahane asserts that in the female Gothic “the heroine is imprisoned not in a house but in the female body perceived as antagonistic to the sense of self, as therefore freakish” (The (M) other Tongue 343). Dimple’s extreme revulsion to the first conceived foetus in her body and the macabre reactions of the pregnant woman to her own body can be cited as examples of gothic style. For instance, her reaction to her pregnancy “sometimes, under the cover of her loose sari, she gave vicious squeeze to her stomach as if to force a vile thing out of hiding” (Wife 30). Later when her
attempts to evict the foetus fail she takes grotesque pleasure in killing a pregnant rat: "...she smashed the top of a small grey head. It lay behind a plastic pail.... It had a strangely swollen body" (35). Coming from a European tradition, this genre was explored by American women writers from Ann Radcliff and Monk Lewis to Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Katherine Ann Porter and more recently Shirley Jackson. Gilman's use of Gothic in the novel *The Yellow Wallpaper* is depicted through the heroine's wild fantasies, madness, repressions and infanticide impulses. This is similar to the behaviour of Dimple in *Wife*. But in the cross-cultural context, the Indian heroine seems to suffer more due to her uprootedness and cultural alienation. In other words, the female gothic when translated into the multiethnic rubric of American society becomes material for culture collision that is manifested through various gothic elements.

Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our will* draws up a strong case for the politicisation of rape as a feminist issue. Brownmiller observed that the ultimate effect of rape was to introduce fear in the woman's mind, to reinforce the concept that woman always needs protection and can never live or move about like men. In the racist social environment the urban context of crime and racial tension adds to the Gothic atmosphere in the novel. References to muggings, bizarre killing on the streets, and violence on women by
foreigners are the fears which beset Tara and Dimple in America. Given the culture of violence and crime in the U.S., the female Gothic looks increasingly a realist mode. Mukhejee's novels, *Wife* and *Jasmine*, aesthetically wield the Gothic elements both in the atmosphere as well as the characters. This is being increasingly used by writers, who depict violence-centered plots, and seek alternate strategies for depicting an increasingly terrifying reality.

The search or struggle for a sense of ethnic identity is grounded in a connection to the past. The meaning abstracted from that past can result in the discovery of a vision, which can take a number of forms. Sometimes the contemporary reinvention of ethnic identity through remembering is a modern day version of the earlier Pythagorean notion of memory that was once the sole means of preserving knowledge of this world. The soul that engaged in memory exercises, in recollection when proceeding to the next world, was believed to be able to escape the cycles of rebirth. “Only through memory honed by constant exercise and effort, could one purge the sins of past lives, purify the soul, ascend and escape from oblivious repetitions” (*The Third Woman* 197).

Tan's first generation Chinese immigrants use stories, legends, episodes, anecdotes and events from the past to familiarize their daughters about their ethnicity and ethnic country. Tan has used memory narratives to bridge the cultural gap as well as
generational gap between Chinese American mothers and their daughters. The use of memory is also a literary device employed by the ethnic writer in autobiographies. Novels like The Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife reveal that memory is conceived not only in the idioms of the static picture, as 'image', presentation, an impression, and so on but also serve as stories and narratives relating to the past, which in the case of the ethnic writer becomes a means of self-determination and identity in multicultural society. Identity and self-definition is almost certainly seen to be activated from memory.

Tan has employed the bifurcate view of memory narrative that permits the consideration of specific life-story as imagery of existential themes or problems about which the story is told, and the existential perception as a comprehensive context in which meaningful questions can be asked about the factual events of that life-story. In order to survive the drastic changes in these lives, these women need to maintain a psychological continuity, a coherent picture of the life-world, and a continuity of self. Such a need requires the assuring structure of memory narrative: life story narrative. According to Ben Xu in his essay 'Memory and the Ethnic self', "memory is for them a socializing, ego forming expression of anxieties, hopes, and survival instinct" (6). Lionel Trilling in his
essay "A sense of the past" argues that the pastness in a work of art gives it an extra-aesthetic authority, which is incorporated into its aesthetic power (368).

The historical milieu in which Tan locates a major part of her stories assign to the text a concreteness and authenticity which the work may otherwise not posses. This is especially explored as a literary strategy by ethnic writers mediating their ethnic culture to a non-ethnic audience /reader. Tan uses oral histories transmitted down the generations through a matrilineal genealogy. The method of narration is that of simple story telling technique. This technique is a perfect device deployed by the writer who wishes to blend legend, history and ethnic culture into fictional narration. It has been a favourite strategy of ethnic women writers- African-, Asian-, and American Indians as is seen in the novels of Alice Walker, Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Leslie Marmon Silko respectively. What is transmitted from generation to generation is not only the stories, but the very power of transmission. Kingston's mother's stories make her a warrior-woman-story-teller who continues to fight in America, the fight her mother fought in China. Twenty years after Kingston heard the story of her aunt, who killed herself along with her unborn child, she breaks the spell cast upon her aunt by telling the world about her, in the work The Woman
Warrior. This aunt is given the name No-Name Woman which itself speaks for the social ostracism and condemnation she suffered.

Trinh-ha Minh in her work Woman Native Other states that story telling is a “phase of communication,” “the natural form for revealing life.” Its fascination lies in its “power both to give a vividly felt insight into the life of other people and to revive or keep alive the forgotten, dead-ended, turned-into-stone parts of ourselves” (123). According to this critic, the line demarcating the oral from the written tradition becomes blurred when dealing with such talk-story tradition of non-western societies, like African, Chinese, or the Native American Indian. The stories in The Joy Luck Club differ from that of The Woman Warrior; yet they serve the same function. These stories are used by mothers to calm and quiet their daughters, when they are afraid. These are stories about a safe and secure past. For instance, the daughter in The Woman Warrior feels loved when her mother’s story telling leads her “out of nightmares and horror movies” (89). Something similar happens with Waverly Jong in The Joy Luck Club. After a conflict with her mother, the latter begins to tell Waverly (in Chinese) about her family and background; and although Waverly does not know where the conversation will lead, she feels soothed (182). In this way talk-stories become a means of transmitting ethnic ancestry, personal/country’s history, and becomes instrumental in
constructing identities. According to Babs Boter in the essay "The Great Power of My Mother Talking Story" the mothers do not only use their stories to help reconstruct a past for their daughters, but also to create and control their present and future" (Multiculturalism And The Canon150). This is reiterated by Amy Tan in her interview with Susan Kepner where she states that "the Chinese mothers in her book map out personally their daughter's lives" (Focus 36.5.59). The Chinese mothers are frightened and confused in the new environment, and fear the loss of ethnicity in the younger generation. In a possessive way, they raise their daughters with cautionary tales, trying to hold on to them, affirming their motherly power. In Joy Luck Club Rose is told stories by her mother, about the bad man who lived in the basement. She was prevented from going there by her mother who told her horror stories about Mr.Chou. Talking-story, or story-telling technique is a familiar narrative strategy in ethnic women's fiction because women are proverbially considered good story-tellers.

The Joy Luck Club is written in short-story-like vignettes, which alternate back and forth between the lives of four Chinese women in pre-1949 China and the lives of their American born daughters in California. Each story is told in the first person narrative. Tan has deployed the art of story telling to a perfection in her novels. The easy, informal, conversational style in which the
stories are told, becomes an aesthetic strategy to bridge the cultural – generational gap. For the daughters who have never seen their homeland, their mother’s stories are a means to construct their past because they explain to them who their forebears were and what their heritage consists of. The stories also function as a means to construct identities. The rendering of oral history of China, through the art of story-telling adopted by Tan, recalls the folkloric tradition of African American women’s writings. Many of the stories told by the Chinese mothers have mythic qualities. They have been borrowed from family tales and cultural legends, and are threaded together with a common denominator of the universal mother-daughter bond, which is an ethnic trait in the case of Chinese Americans.

Bharati Mukherjee as the writer of immigrant tales underscores the reinvention of the woman-centred oral tale in the narrative structure and thematic concern of *Jasmine*. Pushpa N. Parekh in her essay included in *Critical Perspectives* opines that “Jasmine – Jane, in realising her potential as a ‘speaking person’ and ‘teller of tales,’ creates the new voice and vision of the immigrant woman defining her ‘changing into’ and ‘transforming of’ the world around her” (122). She adapts the oral method of transmitting knowledge and wisdom through short, insightful self-created proverbs outlined by brutal honesty and biting candour.
According to Parekh, in *Jasmine* "Mukherjee unravels the triple voice-strands in the complex trial of the Jyothi-Jasmine-Jane persona" (123). Thus in this novel, the novelist achieves a complex blending of traditional and modern strategies. Mukherjee in an interview with Carb points out this aspect of her technique. "As a Hindu, I was brought up on oral tradition and epic literature . . . I believe in the existence of alternate realities, and this belief makes itself evident in my fiction" (651).

The literary devices employed by Tan and Mukherjee are part of the aesthetics of the ethnic female literary tradition. It is also explicit in the particular use of myths by the two writers in their fiction. Myth does not contain its own purpose. On the other hand it contains an argument, which is made explicit in the deployment of the myth within a specific narrative. Tan as well as, Mukherjee, re-vision and re-interpret, traditional myths and in the process, render a feminist perspective to their stories. This is a distinct feminist strategy, which Adrienne Rich defines as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (*Of Woman Born* 35). The displacement of focus adopted by Tan in *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, corresponds to the displacement of violence, in Mukherjee’s *Wife*: from the self, as is the Sita-like Indian women’s habit, to the ‘Other’ which in the story of Dimple is Amit.
Tan's second novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* shifts focus from the man (God) to his wife. This philandering deity of Chinese mythology was rewarded in heaven for his irresponsible ways while his faithful wife Guo went unrewarded. Tan's protagonist Weili in this novel, is the Kitchen God's wife. The husband Wen Fu, was like the kitchen god in his unscrupulous, immoral ways. But Tan's woman (wife) is rewarded for her patience and toleration of a sadist husband. After living a decade or so as Wen Fu's wife, Winnie\Weili meets a Chinese American named Jimmy Louie in Shanghai who rescues her from misery and gives her a new life in America. Thus the story of the Kitchen God's wife ends happily in Tan's novels.

The motif of the long suffering wife underlying the Chinese and Indian mythology is re-interpreted, re-invented by these two writers. In the case of Tan, the narration shifts focus from the man deity to his silent wife. For Mukherjee, Dimple becomes a subverted Sita, one who takes revenge on her husband-enemy. Such a displacement of focus is a deliberate strategy of delegitimation. According to Rachel Du Plessis narrative displacement or delegitimation "breaks sequence" and is identified as a mark of Otherness. Tan's focus on the God's wife comes, so to say, from the 'other side;' it is an articulation of a personality "not noticed before or if noticed... guiltily suppressed." (*De/colonizing the Subject* 226).
Mukherjee’s novel *Wife* employs the Sita archetype in the character of Dimple. Like other Indian Hindu women, Dimple has set for herself the ideal of Sita in her role as wife to Amit. Internalised social values conflict with individualistic aspirations in this immigrant. The Hindu male in India expects his wife to be like Sita, selfless, devoted, faithful and forgiving towards her husband. Sita in the epic *Ramayana* ends her life on the earth when she suffers injustices at the hands of Rama and Ayodhya people. Mukherjee’s Sita (Dimple) however, is unable to endure the blows to her emotional, mental, spiritual self. She is an ordinary Bengali woman, of a somewhat over-imagination and frail psyche who is unable to rise to the stoicism of Sita. Therefore, she opts to kill her tormentor and survive in the world. In this way at the end of the novel, the novelist brings about a complete subversion of the popular myth.

Mukherjee’s preoccupation with Hindu gods and Goddesses, bespeaks her cultural inheritance, which she willingly puts to use in her narratives through religious (Hindu) imagery, legendary stories and myths. Her novel *Jasmine* stands upon the fundamental philosophy of Kabir which is illustrated by the picture of the broken clay pitcher on the jacket cover of this novel. Jasmine’s rebirth begins with her Kali-like transformation from a victim to an offender, wreaking vengeance upon the wrong doer. Even in the
novel *The Holder of the World*, where the protagonist is an American (Hannah), the writer introduces Hindu mythological stories of Rama, Sita, Hanuman, and Ravana through the Hindu maid Bhagmati. The most recent novel *Leave It To Me*, although about a Eurasian, begins with reference to Durga and ends with Debby adopting the name Devi.

The use of Indian mythology, and religion has been explained by Mukherjee, in her non-fictional work co-authored with Clark Blaise, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*. Mukherjee here opines that her aesthetics must accommodate a decidedly Hindu imagination with an American craft of fiction. She further asserts that since narrative structure influenced by the Hindu imagination are “non-causal, non-western” her concept of what constitutes a story “are radically different from the western writer” (286). Mukherjee therefore, places the idea of the Hindu imagination as the mark of her identity as a non-western writer. She celebrates her own Whitman-like spirit as the singer of “fluid identities” (*Darkness*, Intro xv) as she sees herself as the newly initiated writer of the diasporic epic romance. *Jasmine* reformulates the American romance, depicting the development of an autonomous subject, who enters the new world and successfully negotiates the dangers to a happily-ever-after conclusion, with her true love. This novel employs the frontier myth of the American dream, which celebrates
a nomadic existence, travelling west. The frontier saga is replicated in such novels by reproducing the hegemonic epic of the U.S. as the nation of limitless opportunity, freedom and triumphant individualism.

By narrating stories about women in a family, of over three generations Amy Tan seems to be following the tradition of generational saga which was started in the seventies and eighties by Belva Plain's novel *Evergreen*. But the seemingly new genre was prevalent in classical literature in works such as *Oedipus Rex*, *The Aeneid*, *King Lear* and *War and Peace*. It was continued in the twentieth century by writers such as Galsworthy and Faulkner who used generations in a family as subject of their narratives. As a new genre it emerged from the tradition of Galsworthy, and later from that of Alex Hailey’s *Roots* to become particularized by women writers across continents. The Asian Immigrant writer in America focuses on women spanning generations as well as continents by following the immigration of their grant parents from their native countries to the “golden shores” of America, and the subsequent careers, loves, and struggles of their children as well as grand children. Mary Dearborn in her work *Pocahontas’s Daughters*, remarks that such works are concerned with the meaning of ancestry and inheritance in the making of the American self: “they explore the ethnic woman’s place in American culture” (160). Today
it has become a favourite strategy of narration adopted by feminist ethnic writers and occupies a centrality of concerns about ancestry, inheritance and generation in American women's fiction. Belva Plain's precursor in the generational saga was Gertrude Stein whose 1925 novel *The Making of Americans* is in some sense a generational saga. In the novel which Marianne Moore terms a "living genealogy," the novel of Stein explores the concerns of the ethnic American Woman about the meaning of ancestry in female identity. This Jewish immigrant writer fully understood the essentially bifurcated quality of American identity. Tan is the contemporary Asian American writer, along with Kingston, and others to follow this ethnic women's literary tradition. However, Tan's narratives have a feminist perspective. In this way she differs from Stein who is concerned with the Hersland family, from father David Hersland to his grand children. Stein's women character's do not emerge as complete in the way her men characters do; on the other hand Tan creates memorable women characters like Suyuan Woo, Weili and Kwan.

The African- American writers such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Mary Angelou, are as much preoccupied with the theme of matrilineage in narratives as is Amy Tan in her first two novels. The mother-daughter relationship depicted by Tan in these novels acquire novelty due to their cultural – ethnic specificity. The text of
matrilineage in Tan does not suffer maternal deathbed in fiction like it is seen in the African American women’s fictions. In this way the feminist inscriptions of the “romance of the daughter,” is deviated by the novelist. Marianne Hirsch in The *Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative Psychoanalysis, Feminism* suggests the scantiness of such “corrective family romances, incorporating rather than repressing maternal discourse, as the need for feminist writers to construct a new family romance, to move the mother from “object to subject” (136-137). Tans first novel *The Joy Luck Club* is remarkable for grounding the voice of the mothers as well as of daughters, written in a total of sixteen chapters. In combining the voices of both daughter and mother within a single narrative, Tan portrays multiple female consciousness. This is because the maternal voices in the novel bespeak differences derived from the mother’s unique positioning in culture and history as well as the subjectivities they inscribe.

It has been noted that in writings by Asian American women, issues of matrilineage are closely bound with those of acculturation and race. Thus Shirley Lim writes: “The essential thematics of maternity is also the story of race.... [The Mother] is the figure not only of maternity but also of racial consciousness” (*Feminist Studies* 19.3. 293). In Tan’s fiction we see the mother performing the role of culture preserver and practitioner to second-generation
immigrant children who are more Americanised. The mother’s primary role in *The Joy Luck Club* as well as *The Kitchen God’s Wife* is to set into motion the daughter’s working towards a separate selfhood and a new racial identity. The voices of the daughters alternate with that of the mother. The first four chapters (stories) are narrated by each of the four daughters in the first person narrative. This is followed by stories told by the three mothers, because one of the mother is already dead when the novel opens. Tan’s first novel, thus, interweaves seven voices: four of daughters and three of mothers and thus can be categorized as “mother daughter plot” as defined by Hirsch. In her essay “Daughter-text\Mother-text” Marina Heung writes:

*The Joy Luck Club* moves maternity to the center. It locates subjectivity in the maternal and uses it as a pivot between the past and the present. In so doing, it reclaims maternal difference and reframes our understanding of daughterly difference as well (*Feminist Studies* 19.3.599).

In following the multiple voice narration Tan participates in and contributes to a tradition of multiple monologue narrative. There have been precedence-setting experiments by Woolf, and Faulkner. This kind of multiple perspective form partakes of a Bakhtin hetroglossia, as has been mentioned earlier in Chapter
four, of this dissertation. Tan’s novel *The Joy Luck Club*, offers a heteroglot collection of very different yet fully valid voices, each presented from its own perspective with relativistic and centrifugal implications. Instead of subordinating the voices of all characters to an overriding authorial voice, one finds a polyphonic discourse in which authorial voice is one among the many voices. This is an individualistic feature of Tan’s writing, and contributes to the interest sustained throughout the reading. Mukherjee’s narratives on the other hand, are told from a single perspective / voice. While her first novel *The Tiger’s Daughter* had an omniscient narrator, the novelist abandons this strategy with her subsequent novels. However, her novel *The Holder of the World* employs the multiple voice technique in narration as we hear the story told by Hannah as well as Bhagmati, and in the last chapters, Hester and Bhagmati become one voice.

The plot structure appropriated by Tan in her first two novels follows a pattern and has a closure. *The Joy Luck Club*, ends with the happy reunion of June and her Chinese half-sisters Wang Chu Yu, Wang Wan Hwa. *The Kitchen God’s Wife* ends on a note of relief and happiness between mother and daughter hitherto inexperienced. Valerie Miner has noted that the novel *The Joy Luck Club* is a novel which is “narrated horizontally as well as vertically” (66) June’s symbolically complete and symmetrical story is
contained within an overarching framework, wrapping around a grouping of other stories, whose arrangement is neither causal nor linear. Although June's story offers closure in its progression from loss to recuperations, the other narratives are grouped in loose juxtaposition with each other. The mothers' stories are included in the first and last of the four main sections/units in the novel and recount incidents in China. The daughters' stories appear in the middle two sections and are set in the immediate past or proximate present. This pattern is reversed in the next novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*. This novel begins with the daughter's narration in the present tense and the story is located in America. It is continued again in the final chapter. In between the first two and the final two chapters, the plot is set in the past in China and is narrated by Pearl's mother Weili.

*The Joy Luck Club*, appears as stories strung together like beads on a string. The unifying symbol is the mahjong game played at the Joy Luck Club every week. On closer reading the antonym of each story as a clear-cut unit begins to dissolve, giving way to a "subterranean pattern of resonances and motifs, erasing the definite boundaries between individual narratives" (*Feminist Studies* 19.3. 610). Actions and motifs mirror each other from story to story, undermining absolute distinctions of character and voice, for instance Ying-Ying learns from the moon lady that the woman is
'Yin' and the man is 'yang.' (Joy Luck Club 81). Ying Ying's lesson about the yin and yang is echoed in Rose's description of her marriage: "We became inseparable, two halves creating the whole: Yin and yang. I was victim to his hero. I was always in danger -- and he was always rescuing me" (118-119).

Tan's device of connecting motifs between disparate stories that often seem interchangeable, is motivated by her intention to undermine the independence of individual narrative unit. The title of Rose's narration "Half and Half" is echoed at the end of a story narrated by June when, turning to the piano that she has abandoned for many years, she plays two old tunes and realises that they are "two halves of the same song" (144). The theme of "half and half" is continued in the story told by Waverly in which her mother tells her that she has inherited half of her character traits from each parent. Thematic echoes of this kind proliferate the novel. Waverly's "good stuff" that she has inherited from her mother reiterates the theme of "best quality" that is continued in another story told by June in 'Best Quality' where June's mother chides her for not wanting the best for herself. Meanwhile the section "Four Directions" takes us back to the first story in the novel, where we find June and her aunties seated at the majongg table, each occupying one of its "four directions." Obviously the notion "four directions is emblematic of the novel's centrifugal structure. This is
intoned by June when she says, "It's the same old thing, everyone talking in circles" (The Joy Luck Club 21). With its mirrored motifs and interchangeable characteristics, The Joy Luck Club demands a reading that is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic. Aligning itself with the modernist tradition of spatial form in narrative, it defeats an effort to read it according to linear chronology alone. This is what gives the novel its many layered texture and it is undeniably appealing as a form of narratology.

The multivalent structure of The Joy Luck Club resists reduction to simple geometric designs. Through the novels interweaving of time frames and voices three generations of women are included within a relational network linking grandmother, mother, daughters, aunts and sisters. Two figures: rectangle and circle help chart Tan’s play on the theme of maternality. As the novel begins, June takes her place with the three Joy Luck aunties around the mahjong table. Her position, at the table faces east and symbolises the direction of her later journey east, towards China to see her half sisters. At the end of the novel, with June's story, the trope of the rectangle merges with that of the circle: June’s arrival in China brings her full circle to the place where her mother’s story began; her meeting with her half sisters sets into motion a circulation of mirrored relationships, blurring identities, generation and language since it repudiates linearity and symmetry. The circle
is a privileged motif in feminist writing; one that suggests the possibility of reconfiguring traditional familial dynamics and dismantling the hierarchical arrangements of the oedipal triangle and the patriarchal family. Jean Wyatt in her book on the reclamation of the pre-oedipal in women's novels analyse this trend of alternative family relations as challenging the rigid gender and generational hierarchy in the patriarchal family.

Ben Xu, a critic writing on Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club* is of the opinion that the book is not so much a novel as a succession of events carefully grouped in terms of themes as well as generation distribution: mothers and daughters. He discovers the sixteen stories in the book grouped into four sections: two outer sections and two inner sections. The outer section has stories by three mother-narrators, and Jing-Mei Woo who stands in for her deceased mother. The two inner sections consist of stories by four-daughter narrators. The stories in the first two sections are followed by successive denouements in the next two sections, leading to a series of revelations. All the energies set in motion in the first story of the book, which is told by the book's 'frame work' narrator - June Woo, comes to fruitful release in the book's last story told by the same narrator Jing-Mei Woo. It is she who tells the book's two frame stories; the first ending with a family reunion in China, suggests struggle, a journey of maturity, ethnic awakening, and
return home, not only for Jing mei Woo, but metaphorically for all daughters in *Joy Luck Club, Kitchen God’s Wife* and *The Hundred Secret Senses*. In the last novel of Tan the sudden unveiling of Chinese ethnicity in the life of Olivia Bishop who for a long time identified herself with her Caucasian mother, is a realisation that dawns upon her, during her visit to China, accompanied by her stepsister Kwan.

These Asian American writers have deployed the age-old literary device of prefixing prefaces or epigraphs to their individual sections. Tan has stated that she planned the prefaces from the beginning although they were written last. Tan’s prefaces are written in a lyrical, mythical prose style, before each section in *The Joy Luck Club* serves as a universalizing backdrop against which to see the particularized monologues” (*MELUS* 19.2. 111). Each monologue narration following a preface can be seen as an Iserian theme set against the horizon of the respective prefaces. These prefaces also help the readers to pick on what Tan calls the ‘emotional curve’ of each quartet. (*Address*).

The prelude to Part One: ‘Feathers from a Thousand Li Away’, presents in fable-like form, a nameless Chinese woman who emigrated to America with hopes that she would have a daughter who would lead a better life than was possible for a woman in China. The Chinese woman is full of good intentions and hopes, for
that daughter. But her relationship with her daughter is characterised by distance and lack of communication. The following four monologues, which come after this preface, reveal mothers who bemoan the distance between themselves and their daughters, in other words between traditional Chinese and the Americanised Chinese Americans. This prefatory piece thus, helps to organise the four very different opening monologues around that 'emotional curve' that serves as a horizon against which the monologues can be apprehended.

The brief table – like anecdote which forms the preface to the second section titled 'The Twenty six Malignant Gates', helps to organise the daughters' monologues by suggesting that Chinese mothers can be overbearing in their attempts to protect and control their daughters, and this can result in rebelliousness on the part of the daughters as well as lead to their misfortune. Thus if the first preface prepares the readers to be sympathetic towards the mother, the second preface prepares the way towards demanding sympathy for the daughters. The monologue in *Joy Luck Club*, are set against third person interludes that function by suggesting a universal backdrop to the series of individualised voices. The preface in this novel uses nameless human figures and abstract situations to suggest general truths.
The section 'Queen Mother of the Western Skies' opens with a preface in which Tan reiterates the generational continuity of Chinese women. In this short interlude a grandmother and her grandchild are described in a mythical conversation: "...said the woman, teasing her baby granddaughter. 'Is Buddha teaching you to laugh for no reason?... I taught my daughter, your mother to shed her innocence so she would not be hurt as well'...the baby laughed listening to her grandmother's laments" (The Joy Luck Club 213).

A dialogic relationship also exists between the final fable-like preface and the final four monologues. The preface gives shape to the monologues that follow, by presenting a mother who has a grandchild, and who is treated sympathetically: she is self-critical and hopeful for her daughter, wishing her daughter learns how to "lose her innocence but not her hope" (213). As the subtextual meaning is one of sympathy to the mother, this preface is a forerunner to the monologues that follow, which is also in a manner sympathetic to the mothers. Reading each monologue in this cluster against the backdrop of the fourth preface helps establish the thematic point. Thus in The Joy Luck Club the monologues are set against third person interludes that function by suggesting a universal backdrop to the series of individualised voices.
Use of prefaces or epigraphs appear as a common literary strategy in the novels of both Tan as well as Mukherjee. Bharati Mukherjee in her novel *The Holder Of The World* uses lines from Keat's poem *Ode on a Grecian Urn* as epigraphs at the beginning of each Part. Thus part one begins with the epigraph; "Thou still unravished bride of quietness/Thou foster-child of silence and slow...time." This novel is set largely in the seventeenth century Coromandel coast of India under the rule of Aurangazeb, the last Mughal emperor. The exoticism of Mughal culture is effectively captured by the narrative and hence Keats' poem about an exquisite Grecian urn is apt and provides embellishment to the novel. It also serves as a statement of the events that follow in the subsequent pages. For instance, the epigraph in part three is taken from the opening lines of the third stanza of Keats's poem: "Who are these coming to the sacrifice? To what green alter, O my mysterious priests..." In this section the narrative dwells on the tragedy befalling Hannah after the murder of Gabriel and her subsequent flight from the rioting city aided by Bhagmati. Her refuge is Panpur Palace, the abode of Raja Jadav Singh, King of Devgad. Hannah's world of love and happiness is destroyed when the Mughal Emperor mounts a siege of Devgad. Soon she becomes befret of a lover and a home, ready to lead a mission of peace to the Emperor, which in a way becomes a 'sacrifice'- for the King ,for Hannah is made
prisoner in the Emperor's harem. Another sacrifice we see, in the wounded condition of Raja Jaydev Singh who finally dies in a suicidal attack, which he attempts on the invincible Mughal king.

"Thou silent form ....Cold Pastoral!" seems to refer to the great span of periods across centuries. As the narrative returns to the present through the voice of Beigh Masters who states that "it has taken [her] a year and a half to assemble [these] notes..." The reader is informed of the painting titled 'The Apocalypse' or 'The Unravish'd Bride' which portrays the suicidal attack on the fort of Aurangazeb by Jaydev and his subsequent death. The 'silent form' in the painting is the figure of Hannah – 'the blonde woman in a sari, the garish mughal jewels,' (281) it is she who is the center of this creative master piece: both of Mukherjee's novel *The Holder of The World* as well as the anonymous painter's painting titled 'The Apocalypse' or 'The Unravish’d Bride.'

Mukherjee begins her novel *Jasmine* with an epigraph taken from James Gleick, *Chaos*:

The new geometry mirrors a

Universe that is rough....

twisted, tangled, and interwined

Chaos theory or non-linear dynamics as employed by Mukherjee in *Jasmine* is a relatively new phenomenon in literary
Antonio Benitez-Rojo has drawn a link between chaos theory and Caribbean writing:

For a literary critic who wants to find cultural specificities that might differentiate one region from another, the Chaos perspective offers great advantages; its way of looking right at noise and turbulence to find common dynamics...allows us to appreciate that...textual signifiers is neither wholly disorganized nor absolutely unpredictable; rather it responds to...certain regularly repetitive and self-referential figures. (*The Repeating Island* 269).

Benitez-Rojo's Chaos is not absence of meaning, but presence, a sea of inexhaustible information and an active force in its own right, no more void. This is the same with Mukherjee's novel, itself written in a succession of "twenty-six short takes fast-moving and varied" (*Iowa Review* 29). Michiko Kakutani, reviewing the novel for the *New York Times Book Review* described it as overwhelming the reader with the sheer amount of its plot (29). In her interview with Bill Moyers, Mukherjee stated that she had crammed in "a sense of the entire world" intentionally, as a reaction against minimalism in American writing. In order to avoid a Dickensian or Thackerian imitation, Mukherjee had compressed the maximum story into a single novel, "A series of jump-cuts gives the
novel an unusual combination of density and irregularity, a sense of abundant-yet broken up-action" (The Ballistic Bard 152). Jasmine’s trajectory breaks up and reforms. Images of splitting, breaking, spiralling, twisting and scarring pullulate along her path, together with technological referents. Candia McWilliam offers an apt description:

The temporal form of the book is as intricately logical as electric wiring, moving not serially but in bundled threads between the area of darkness of the east and the often artificial light of America. From the electrical storm of ‘high status goods’ which hit India thirty years ago, from the flood fighting over hog pens on an Iowa farm, to the hybrid gismos built by Jane’s adopted Vietnamese Du, electricity makes an illuminating shocking circuit of the book (London Review of Books 23).

Chaos theory has reshaped the face of the scientific establishment in the second half of the twentieth century with its principle of orderly disorder, focusing on mechanisms that make unpredictability a fact of life, rather than the aberrations it appears in Newtonian mechanics. Several key features of Chaos theory are formally and thematically present in Jasmine: a startling incongruity between causes and effects, nonlinearity into various
senses, recursive symmetries, fractal forms and feedback mechanism, which create loops in which output from the system feeds back into the system as inputs. Four contested areas, which are important points of debate in Chaos theory specifically impact upon the novel: determinism, individualism, woman and the relationship of local to global. Chaos theory thus links our everyday experiences with laws of nature by revealing subtle relationships between orderliness and randomness. Katherine Hayles in her illuminating book on this subject titled *Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* states: “Chaotic unpredictability and nonlinear thinking however are, just the aspects of life that have tended to be culturally encoded as feminine” (173). In the same book it is stated that “in the Western traditions, Chaos has played the role of the Other – the unrepresentative, the unarticulated, the unformed.” This remark suggests that Chaos has a very intimate connection with the politics of post colonial representation: “through its concern with conditions that made movement from local sites to global systems possible, it exposes presuppositions within older paradigms that made universalisation appear axiomatic” (*Chaos Bound* 16). Local knowledge now being highly valorised in post colonial studies, the ethnic details in the works of Mukherjee becomes part of post colonial literature. In fact Asian American writers of America share
the condition of post coloniality with other post colonial countries such as India, Africa, etc. Chaos theory then, offers a fruitful area to dispute the perception of marginal territories as areas of lack, disorder and inevitable entropic aggression. Here disorder is generative; marginality translates as possibility, and transforms the larger world beyond it. As postcolonial individualist woman; abandoning local determinism for global emancipation, Jasmine is the point at which all these threads intertwine.

*Jasmine* exemplifies that sensitivity to initial conditions, which loom large as a causative factor in chaos theory. In its opening scene, the novel immediately invites the reader to consider the oppositions between determinism and free will, nothingness and infinite aspiration. Jasmine seven year old already “scabrous-armed” (3) hears the Hindu astrologer prophesy her widowhood and exile. When she disputes the prediction he strikes her, causing visible disfigurement. But she refuses to accept the pitting of her forehead as mutilation; instead she celebrates it as a source of vision, the legendary ‘third eye’ of the sage. This attitude of Jasmine is a distinct deviation from the superstitious belief a Hindu has in predictions and astrology. Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* opts for fluidity, rather than stagnation, and with fluidity comes both possibility and the risks of turbulence and fracture. Even at her birth, an attempt was made to strangle her; but it failed, leaving a *ruby-red choker-
scar" which, to Jasmine was a permanent adornment, rather than the evidence of a fatal injury: “In surviving [she] was already Jane, a fighter and adapter” (40). Unlike her friend Vimla, Jasmine embraces the fluidity and permeability which emerge from fracture, as a continuity without conventional binary division.

Jasmine repeatedly encounters violent form of determinism: resistance, flight and rescue to a new existence by an old figure such as Masterji, Lilian Gordon, Professor Vadhera, Mrs. Ripplemeyer senior; only to move on in a spiralling trajectory which is repetitive yet different. The characteristic note is struck in Jasmine’s route to America which takes her from India to the Middle East, to Sudan, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Paramaribo, and Florida. Non-Linearity is the way forward for Jasmine: “The zig-zag route is straightest” (Jasmine 101). Landing in Florida, her first sight of the promised land is of America in fractal form, as she states in the novel: “The first thing I saw were the two cones of a nuclear plant and smoke spreading from them in complicated but seemingly purposeful patterns” (Jasmine 107). The chaotic patterns of destructive energy is linked to a more banal cause at Jasmine’s feet: she wades into Eden through a mass of swirling litter. America’s ambivalent status as order or disorder, is continually emphasised by the novelist through these images.
Jasmine's guide into the United States is, like her, scarred. "Half-face," has lost an eye, ear and most of one cheek in Vietnam. For Half-face, Asia is a benighted 'bush' world, entirely devoid of technological sophistications, Jasmine's account of her husband's electrical business triggers fury. The regression to the opening scene, in reference to the bloody tongue, the blow to the forehead, the brown water (Half-face's Whiskey), the dead dog, and Half-face's own eyeless, broken body is inescapable. Images of fracture and destructions coexist with images of a contained, fertile order within. The baby is described as "a whole new universe" (235) floating inside Jasmine. Earlier in the novel Jasmine recalled her grandmother's stories of Vishnu, the Preserver, "containing our world inside his potbellied stomach" (224).

In Mukherjee, the snakes and Gods remain in the "Hindu instinct for miraculous transformations of the literal." In the noisy data of the temple frieze, in which several schemes coexist, the frieze expresses a vision of fluidity, connectedness, non-linear aesthetics, sinuosity and transformation, containing the local detail and the global vision, a Third World aesthetic which coincides with a late twentieth-century scientific conception. Mukherjee has described Hinduism as a kind of geophysical vision rather than a religion, and for the west, it has often been an apparent chaotic vision.
Naipaul's Jasmine feeds Mukherjee's Jasmine; is transformed into *Jasmine*, and flows back into *Jane Eyre/Ripplemeyer*. Jasmine's story suggests that intertextuality is a literary equivalent of chaos. Even the smallest story can have enormous effects. Like the beat of a butterfly's wings, the 'local' story may become a tornado when it hits the west, demolishing paradigms of the 'universal', the linear, the classic. Rather than being assimilatory to western norms, *Jasmine* demonstrates how the Third world story may exert its power on First World criticism and writing. Mukherjee insists upon the two-way process involved in all readings. Carmen Faymonville in her essay: "Mukherjee's *Jasmine*" remarks upon the significance of incorporating the American West into the novel, through allusion to the western novel *Shane*. Shane, is a lone, rugged, mysterious individual who arrives at the ranch of a struggling homestead1er, and while he is there a transformation occurs. In the end, Shane is seen riding off into the sunset, headed farther west. The novel depicts the battle between the old order, the shepherders, and the new order of cattleman. Similarly in *Jasmine*, a new class of overlords threaten to alter the landscape of farms in favour of golf courses and amusement. Jasmine had read Shane while in India and was thus ideologically prepared for the frontier lures. Examples of intertextuality is evident in Mukherjee's novel *The Holder of the World* where reference is
made to *The Scarlet Letter*. Hannah’s daughter by the Hindu king Raja Jaydev Singh is given the name “Pearl”, recalling the character Pearl in Hawthorne’s novel. Mukherjee’s novel is, however different, in that, it eschews closure, because beginnings and endings have been resutured in recursive symmetry—as serpent or Vishnu, who is Ananta, endless.

Another literary technique deployed by Mukherjee in her fictions is the use of the motif of fire/burning to mark a transition from a past life to a new life. The narrator in *Jasmine* casually remarks, that Jyoti died when she started the fire in a trash can in Florida. The burning, of Prakash’s suits, books, Jasmine’s sari in a fire, symbolic of a Hindu funeral pyre is the end of Jasmine / Jyoti. As she walks away from the fire started in the motel backyard, she looks forward to a new life, and a new beginning in America. She eventually takes the name Jase / Jane with succeeding men in her life. “The fire marks the extinction of an oppressive gender identity; the notion of both purity (the virtuous woman), and impurity (the raped woman) is destroyed. Henceforth Jasmine can define her own desires, unhampered by conventional duty or morality” (*Critical Perspectives* 188).

As Asian American writers, Tan and Mukherjee share some common characteristics which have been hitherto explored. However, this literature is remarkably heterogeneous and it is this,
which identifies its individualism from other ethnic literature such as African-Mexican-Jewish-American literature. This is manifested in the difference in the thematic concerns as well as the narrative strategies adopted by the two writers.

Amy Tan's literary techniques are sometimes common to mainstream literature and sometimes individualistic in style. Using the motif of mirror or mirroring is common to both kinds of literature. Sylvia Plath has explored the mirror motif in her poems. One also remembers the “stranger” in Jane Eyre's mirrors at those junctures in her life where she embarks on a new life, and perceives herself in a new light or new role. For instance, dressed in her wedding gown, she looks in the mirror and sees a figure which is actually her usual self, but which seems almost a stranger now. In bicultural texts, mirrors and mirroring serve as a revelation to the immigrant who is confronted with a double image so to say: one of his literal self, the other the self which is different from the old ethnic self. “The mirror can suddenly force the ‘traveller’ to see how different he or she is from those others who seem so much at home” (MELUS 60). Perhaps more complicated is the strangeness one can feel when, looking in the mirror, one sees no discernible differences from those around, but rather from one's former image. Or the face in the mirror looks strangely unfamiliar, and that very “newness” engenders a new view of the self. Jing Mei cries at the sight of her
ordinary "ugly" face. As she tries to scratch out the face in the mirror, above the bathroom sink she sees a face staring back. It is then, that she sees what looked to be her prodigy side. She narrates:

I looked at my reflection, blinking so I could see more clearly. The girl staring back at me was angry, powerful. This girl and I were the same. I had new thoughts, wilful thoughts (Joy Luck Club 144).

In this example, what had looked simply "ugly" had become power when fuelled by anger. This power was newly felt, when newly seen through the mirror. It wasn't that the mirror reflected an image different from the anger she was feeling, but that, it made such feelings manifest for the first time. This image of herself was unfamiliar, and the shock of recognition of her "new" face, her prodigy side, allowed her to feel a new inner power that allowed her to defy her mother. As she matures, Jing Mei exhibits less power than the mirror promised.

Tan uses this technique once again in The Joy Luck Club in the beauty parlour incident of Lindo Jong. When Lindo is taken for a hair cut by her daughter Waverly, she is made to sit looking at her reflection. The hair stylist remarks on the uncanny facial resemblance between the mother and the daughter, It proves a consolation to Lindo, at the same time that it annoys the more
Americanised daughter. Earlier, in Lindo's young days, as a newly married woman in China, she had seen her reflection in the mirror, with the bridal purity and discovered her strength:

I was strong. I was pure. I had genuine thoughts inside that no one could see, that no one could take away from me. I was like the wind. (Joy Luck Club 58)

Later on Lindo is able to get out of her disastrous marriage, believing in the inner strength she possessed and which the mirror reflection had revealed to her on her wedding day.

Mirroring technique in bicultural texts, also serve to bring out the disjunction between different versions of the "self." The resurfacing of this technique in literature is connected with the diasporic phenomenon evident the world over, especially in the United States. Individuals whose identity seems bisected by, sometimes fused of two languages and cultures, increasingly make use of this motif to portray the discrepancy, or the identity crisis of bicultural, multicultural individuals. The doubles abounding in Asia American texts are related to all the examples of mirroring found in bicultural texts. Doubling thus serves to dramatise the tensions and contrasts inherent in the bicultural situation, or further the need to be rid of that which the "other self" represents. These doubles also represent that which keeps the ethnic from being "real" American, or more difficult, it reminds them that there
are ways they can never be completely the "real thing" no matter how much they want to be. Waverly may have become more American than her mother, especially since she has chosen to marry a Caucasian, but the mirror reflecting the image of the daughter standing behind her mother, confronts her with her Chinese ethnicity.

Amy Tan’s novels employ alimentary motif, food imagery and food semantics as literary devices of ethnic narratives. San-Ling Cynthia Wong in her book From Necessity to Extravagancy identifies two sets of alimentary motifs common in Asian American literature: “big-eating” to the point of quasi-cannibalistic which is typically associated with the immigrant generation and food prostitution, which is ‘selling’ oneself for treats or basic food stuffs. There is a third motif, food pornography where immigrants make a living by exploiting the exotic aspects of one’s ethnic food ways. In cultural terms it translates to reifying perceived cultural differences and exaggerating one’s Otherness in or to gain a foothold in a white dominated social system. Quasi-cannibalistic images abound the fiction of Tan. For instance “blood of the chicken being used to cook chicken broth” (Hundred Secret Senses 239). Mukherjee also uses ‘big eating’ strategy in Jasmine: the adopted son Du, of the Ripplemeyers has survived hard times in war torn Vietnam. He was kept alive in the refugee camp by eating “rats, roaches, crabs,
The second generation protagonists in Tan's novels, are in Wong's terms, fellow children of necessity. Images of grim eating (Joy Luck Club 32), unsentimental killing for food, such as Jing Mei's birthday crab dinner (201) and oppressive parental expectations recur in the chapters Rules of the Game and Two Kinds in Joy Luck Club. This motive of quasi cannibalistic sacrifice pertaining to the immigrant parents vis-a-vis American born children configuration is seen in the trauma which the child Buncake undergoes each time her foster mother prepares frogs for a meal. Tan describes this in The Hundred Secret Senses:

> While Du Yun peeled those frogs one, after another, Buncake kept her fist wedged hard between her teeth, like a sandbag stopping a leak in a river bank. So no scream came out. And when Du Yun saw the anguish on Buncake's face, she would croon in a mother's sweet voice: "Baby-ah, wait a little longer. Ma will feed you soon" (225-226).

Similar technique is also found in Frank Chin's short story 'Food for All this Dead'. Images of grim eating such as Cleo spitting jellyfish offered by her Chinese grandmother because to her it tasted "like rubber bands" (The Kitchen God's Wife 32). She exchanges it for fragrant beef which she claimed tasted like McDonald's hamburger. "Winnie's mouth is shut tight. She looks
away" (33). Wong attributes the motif of sacrificial eating as being the outcome of the long history of racism and stereotyping experienced by Chinese American.

The overtones of prostitution become evident when Asian women advertise their availability and hope to immigrate to the U.S. by marriage to a U.S. citizen. Typical cases of Asian immigration to the U.S. stem from an imbalance of resources present in World economy. This economic viewpoint is well explored by Mukherjee in her literary narratives. *Jasmine* is one such example. Jyothi's circuitous illegal passage to America in various vessels require prostitution: "numbed surrender to various men for the reward of an orange, a blanket, a slice of cheese" (121). The water she begs from Half-face comes with the rape and is later repaid by murder. The narrator's, common-law marriage to Iowa Banker Bud Ripplemeyer is depicted with an almost calculating ambiguity. To the reader, Jane never reveals her true feelings towards Bud, but hints at the nature of transactions by recalling that the romance begins when she first arrives in Baden looking visibly famished—"You need a meal as well as a job, dear" (196-97) is the way old Mrs. Ripplemeyer brings Jasmine into Bud's life. Though Jasmine's initial intentions for emigration is to commit suicide, the later events, give the suggestion of 'food prostitution' claims Wong (*Reading American Literature* 54).
'Food pornography' is another survival strategy, which unlike sexual pornography is not demeaning and base. Frank Chin describes this as a way of exploiting the exotic aspect of one's food ways to gain acceptance in racist America. Food pornographers take pride in their difference from the mainstream. They depict this in their fiction through elaborate, vivid details about culinary expertise and the pleasure derived in eating ethnic food. Amy Tan displays food pornography in her fiction. Numerous examples can be quoted to prove this. One such example is taken from *The Hundred Secret Senses*:

In the center of the courtyard, Du Lili has made a small twig fire within an iron ring. Kwan sets the wok on top and Du Lili passes out bowls, chopsticks, and cups of tea. Following her lead, [Olivia, Simon, Kwan] squat around.. improvised dinner table...Du Lili plucks a chickens foot from the stew and plops it in ..bowl ... [Olivia] ease [her] teeth on the edge of the thigh and take a puppy nip... chew let it roll on to [her] tongue....The meat is amazingly flavourful, velvety !... eat more... sip the broth, so clean-tasting yet buttery rich (240).

The concept of food pornography has a basis in Asian American history, especially Chinese American history. Early Chinese
immigrants, who were driven from the mines and made scapegoat by white workers, took to working as cooks, laundrymen, houseboys, in short, by serving. In need of food, but barred from formal employment, they could get food only by preparing food for others. Many of them eventually opened restaurants. The primary clientele changed later from fellow Chinese to whites, apparently during the decades of the Exclusion period. Thus the presentation of "ethnic cuisine" preferably in a "exotic" setting provided most Asian immigrant groups with a low cost entry into business ownership. Today many Chinese immigrants run successful hotels and restaurants. Another reason for the variety of Chinese cuisine is attributed to the country's socio-economic conditions in the past. It has been said that China's poverty was responsible for the inventiveness of its cuisine: droughts and famines have compelled the Chinese to make judicious use of every possible kind of edible vegetable and insect. The same "unusual food, can assume multiple meanings both within the Chinese Tradition and in the Chinese American setting. In Joy Luck Club there is an episode in which food pornography is turned in its head to signal its antithesis: resistance to eroticisation. We have an instance of this in the following episode. As a child Waverly Jong used to roam the streets of China town, where she had to suffer endless camera-touting tourists. Once after a particularly obnoxious Caucasian man had
posed her and her playmates with a roasted duck: “its head dangling from a juice covered rope”, Waverly took her revenge by recommending an authentic Chinese restaurant. When the intrigued tourist asked what it served, Waverly shouted, “guts and duck’s feet with octopus gizzards!” and runs away shrieking with laughter (91). Waverly’s list though ‘pornographic’ in appearance and also coloured by the child’s natural glee at the chance to insult adults, represents in fact an act of ethnic counter aggression. It mixes factual description; “guts”, “duck’s feet”, with deliberate exaggeration to convey the speaker’s spite at the cultural voyeur.

Scholars who undertake to study food habits and its sociological importance reveal how to the Chinese, food is also a way of expressing feelings and attitudes. Jing Mei articulates this candidly, when she states that Chinese mothers showed their love towards their children through ‘stern offerings of steamed dumplings, ducks gizzard and crab’ (Joy Luck Club 202) and not through physical gestures of affections such as hugs and kisses. Tan describes particular food eaten for specific occasion by the Chinese. For instance “sun dried oysters were eaten for wealth, a fast-cooked shrimp for laughter and happiness, ‘fasts’ the black hair fungus that soaked up good fortune” (Kitchen God’s Wife 248). The banquet prepared by the hostess who is hosting the Joy Luck Club meeting prepares special food for the occasion: “long rice
noodles for a long life; boiled peanuts for conceiving sons, good luck oranges for a plentiful sweet life. \textit{The Joy Luck Club} 23).

Chinese American literature also employs alimentary images in several permutations. For instance words such as 'swallowing' is used metaphorically by Weili in \textit{The Kitchen God's Wife} when she attributes the death of her husband, a church minister to be the result of "swallowing other people's troubles, until he made himself sick" (26). In another context Weili / Winne describes Hulan, using food imagery: "Her plumpness was round and overflowing in uneven spots, more like a steamed dumpling with too much filling leaking out the side" (215). Suyuan describes the hills in Kweilin as "dripping bowels of an ancient hill" \textit{(Joy Luck Club} 22). Food imagery when used by Tan lends richness and colour to the narrative style. As for example: "rice fields cooked hard as porridge crust" \textit{(Hundred Secrets Senses} 22), Chicken blood congealed to the "colour and consistency of strawberry gelatine"(239). Compared to Tan, Mukherjee does not explore this literary device derived from food semantics abundantly as the Chinese American writer. However, the Indian novelist, makes frequent references to the Indian food eaten by the Asian Indian immigrant community as a comment on their ethnic traits. Food preferences connote individual characteristics as well as community as well as collective tastes. Social gathering becomes more popular when ethnic Indian cuisine
is offered. This is depicted by Mukherjee in *Wife*. At a party hosted by Vinod Khanna, in Manhattan, the ladies are thrilled to see mutton biriyani, chicken tandoori, being served. A discussion about foodstuffs and poultry solicits the opinion among the Indian community that "Indian Chicken may be thinner and smaller than the American chicken but they taste far, far better" (*Wife* 66). Significantly, Dimple murders Amit while he is munching cereals in the kitchen. The last sentence spoken by Amit before being killed is also about food. "We should have more potatoes and less frozen broccoli. You're too extravagant" (*Wife* 212). This reflects on the food prostitution prevalent in the subtext: immigrants come to America to make maximum money within the shortest time. Most of the first generation immigrants plan to return to the native land and then to live comfortably. Amit's reprimand of Dimple on her choice of expensive food such as frozen broccoli is to be seen in this context. The issue of food is the typical Asian immigrant's concern for frugality. Ethnicity and literary aesthetics come together in a unique manner in the deployment of food semantics, imagery, motifs, and food pornography.

American literature is a rich repository of the footprints of ethnicity. American writers from Cotton Mather to Richard Wright, from Charles Brockden Brown to Pietro di Donato, from William Faulkner to Hisaye Yamamoto have dealt with ethnicity in their
literature. Ethnicity is an asset, that is celebrated, in the fictional narratives of Amy Tan and Bharati Mukherjee. Their writings demand a space within American literature specifically due to their ethnic representation. Just as the Harlem Renaissance writers celebrate their negritude through art in the same way the Asian American voices hitherto silent or muted have come to be heard through the writings of Asian American immigrants. Ethnicity of Asian American group is heterogeneous. It is their difference that lends colour and variety to their literature. A study of the ethnicity pervading the narratives of Amy Tan and Bharati Mukherjee has reclaimed their legitimacy in the cultural, literary scene.
NOTES

1. Every evening Kingston’s mother “talk stories”, until the daughter falls asleep. The latter is not able to tell when the stories end and the dreams begin. But she dreams about ghosts and suffers nightmares. The story about her aunt who died in dishonour, comes alive to this writer’s imagination. By telling her daughter not to tell it to anyone, the mother knew that what she was telling would be transmitted by her daughter; for “that’s what Chinese say, they “like to say the opposite” remarks Trinh-ha Minh in her critical work on ethnic women, *Women, Native and Other* (133. Further readings about ‘talk stories’ are available in Roberta Rubenstein’s work *Boundaries of the Self, Gender, Culture, Fiction.*)

2. Leslie Marmon Silko in the back cover of her novel *Ceremony* writes, “I grew up with story-telling...the chanting or telling of ancient stories to effect certain cures or protect from illness and harm have always been part of the Pueblo’s curing ceremonies. I feel the power that the stories still have to bring us together when there is loss and grief”