CHAPTER II
ETHNIC LANDSCAPE

Elaine Kim in her pioneering critical work on Asian American literature discusses the relevance of a contextual approach in the study of this literature. She observes that: "when [those] contents are unfamiliar the literature is likely to be misunderstood and unappreciated" (Preface xv). For instance, the bitterness and rage felt by John Okada's protagonist towards his mother in No-No Boy can be seen as an example of the generational conflict that exists to some extent between all parents and children, as also an illustration of problems faced by the children of immigrant parents. However, Ichiro's anguish cannot be fully understood if isolated from the context of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. According to Kim, "The mother's attitude towards Japan and the son's desire to be accepted as an American are key to understanding their relationship" (Preface xviii). It has been earlier affirmed, in the work of Wilbur Scott, Five Approaches to Literary Criticism that: "art is not created in a vacuum, it is the
work... of an author... answering to the community of which he is an important, because articulate part" (123). Edward Said in his seminal work *Culture and Imperialism* has similarly reiterated that, "authors are not mechanically determined by ideology, class, or economic history. On the other hand they are very much in the history of their societies shaping and shaped by that history and their social experiences in different measure" (Intro xxi). He refers to Dickens' *Great Expectations* to substantiate this idea. On the surface it is a novel about self-delusion; of Pip's vain attempts to become a gentleman, with neither the hard work, nor the aristocratic source of income required for such a role. A sociological critical approach reveals the dynamics of the relationship the English man maintained towards the convicts in Australia. This is exemplified by Pip's hatred for Abel Magwitch in the course of the novel. It is only towards the end that he accepts Magwitch as a surrogate father. Scott, Said as well as Kim, emphasize the context of narratives being an important factor in their appreciation and comprehension. Following this rationale Tan and Mukherjee's novels cannot be studied "antiseptically quarantined from its worldly affiliations" (*Culture and Imperialism* Intro xiv).

Asian American writing from its earliest expressions in the first decade of the twentieth century, to the most recent plays by David Hwang, shows a strong preoccupation with immigrant
history—both of the ethnic country as well as the historical experience in the new country. Ethnic history is inscribed in these texts: history as well as the subject's own story undergoes a process of narrativisation. The subject's own story can be a personal memory. In this way memory and history are represented through narratives of facts and events. Works as varied as Lowe’s and Sone’s autobiographies, Mori’s short stories, Oakda’s novels, Houston’s and Kingston’s histories, Mukherjee’s novels and short stories, Tan’s novels, all share a concern with the sociological backdrop in their attempt to re-write the past within the present. Consequently “they exhibit in different degrees a burden of futility in which the texts demand to be read for their relevance to an outside historical meaning” (The Forbidden Stitch, Intro 57).

Tan uses the history of China in her novels as the stage, for enacting the human tragedies that take place during wartime in a developing country like China. Tan’s use of history in her novels can be called historical in the Faulknerian sense. Just as the characters in William Faulkner’s novels, The Sound and the Fury, The Unvanquished, Light In August are seen to be obsessed with a personal, family or regional past; in the same way the Chinese mother in Tan’s novels constantly make reference to their wartime hardships in China. They regale their American born daughters with true stories about themselves in the China of the twenties and
forties. Faulkner's use of history is different from the treatment of history by historical novelist such as Thackeray and Scott. Tan resembles Faulkner in making use of history through memory narratives in her novels *The Joy Luck Club, The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Hundred Secret Senses*. But Tan differs from the mainstream writers in her treatment of history which is intertwined with an existentialist perception.

Tan's fiction is about Chinese American—both the first generation and the second generation. Her characters both old and young are products of a different time / period, country, geography, culture and architecture. With these she creates a suitable backdrop for her drama of migration, nostalgia for the native land/people/culture, adaptation and acculturation into the new country. Tan draws upon the five major historical events of China over the last hundred years: overthrow of the Heavenly King, Manchu revolution, Sino- Japanese War, World War II, the Communist Revolution, and the Cultural Revolution. In her portrayal of history she seems what Trilling calls in the essay "A Sense of The Past," the classical poet - "a reliable chronicler of events" (259). However in the case of this Asian-American writer, it is not only history which is narrativised from a different position, but also the sociohistorical, sociocultural conditions and norms
which engage the thematic concern of the writer articulating her voice and vision in a cross-cultural and literary milieu.

Compared to Tan, Mukherjee is not greatly concerned with depicting the history of her native country in her novels. She is more interested in depicting the present social reality of the Asian immigrant’s life in contemporary America. Nevertheless as an ethnic writer she cannot but answer to the call of her ethnic consciousness. Her fourth novel *The Holder of the World* is foregrounded in the last decade of the seventeenth century India, when the country was undergoing a transition of power from the Mughals to the English. It is interesting to see how, both Tan and Mukherjee have used the source materials of history and culture as context for their immigrant fiction for which they rely upon autobiographical details, personal observations, memory and oral histories of a matrilineal tradition (as in the case of the Chinese women).

William Boelhower in his work, *Looking Through The Glass* theorises that memory is integrally related to the ethnicisation of the subject through strategies of ethnic semosis. Family, home, community, origin, loss, dislocation, relocation, racial differences, cross-cultural resistance, second generation Americanisation and assimilation, identity destabilization and reformulation are common
trajectories in Asian American literature. This is echoed by Jules Chametzky in these words:

One's own voice and vision are shaped by the special history and normative patterns of rhetoric and thought of a region and a landscape, by the race, gender, and ethnic group one is born into... (*Our Decentralized Literature* Intro 5).

Many of these writers Amy Tan, Garrett Hongo, and David Mura, position their subjects in relation to family and community through immigrant memory and history: of an Asian homeland, of U.S. immigration, and of cultural loss and change. This immigrant logo insists on a time before U.S entry and on culture separate from U.S-Anglo identity. This trend of using history of the homeland in the narratives by the Asian American writers can be attributed to their relatively short history in the United States as compared to other ethnics such as African Americans and Jewish Americans. It is also due to the difference between an Oriental / Asian / Chinese American and a Negro. The Chinese race is heirs to a rich culture that existed much earlier than the British or American culture. The self - concept of Chinese immigrant can be bruised but not easily crushed. On the other hand the African knows no ancestor in Africa. He does not remember his native land because he has been separated from it since generations. Gerald Hasham in *Forgotten*
Pages of American Literature perpetuates this idea that "...the average Chinese American knows that China has produced great philosophies, and with that knowledge has come a greater sense of ethnic pride. Contrasted ...with the abject cultural deprivation long foisted upon Afro-Americans, Asian-Americans have an inner resource..." (79).

"Our grandmothers are our historical links"\(^1\) writes Connie Young Yu in her essay included in the anthology titled Making Waves. We see these links made by the mothers in Tan’s novels: Suyuan Woo, Lindo Jong, An-Mei Hsu, Ying-Ying in The Joy Luck Club, Weili in The Kitchen God’s Wife, Kwan in The Hundred Secret Senses, who tell their daughters about themselves and what their mothers have explained to them about their lives in China. History is recreated through memory in the ‘Talk-story’ technique popular among Chinese Americans. Walter Ong in his Introduction to Three American Literatures has suggested that the history of Chinese Americans has been preserved through oral transmission into succeeding generations because, until the recent ethnic revivalism in America they were not encouraged to speak about their culture or history. "Silence has been part of the price of the Chinese American’s survival in a country that hated them" (207). Despite a history of seven generations America does not recognise Asian-Americans as a presence in the country. Kim in her work An
Introduction to Asian American literature and the Social Context, has suggested that the “contemporary Asian American writer is often forced to try to piece together and sort out the meaning of the past from the shreds of stories heard in childhood or from faded photographs that have never been explained” (262). This technique is resorted to by Weili in The Kitchen God’s Wife. She shows her daughter her photo album and explains the location and sentiments behind each snapshot. In this way Tan covers a span of a decade in Chinese history, which is inextricably connected, with the personal story of the protagonist Weilie as well as that of the writer Amy Tan. Pointing to a particular photograph Weilie tells Pearl: “see this picture, my smile, my puffy eyes. This picture... has special meaning. Your father took this picture maybe one year after I ran away from Wen Fu” (464). After the long traumatic married life with Wen Fu her second marriage with Jimmy Louie brings her peace and happiness. She explains this to Pearl by showing her, her smiling photographs. A later photograph shows her “skiny” [sic] so that even the “sweater droops on her shoulder.” Pearl is told by her mother that this particular photo was taken after the death of her son Dhanru.

The tragic death of Dhanru and Jiaguo caused by plague – infected rats, which we are told, had been released by the Japanese before their withdrawal at the end of the war, is one among the
many tragedies and calamities that befall the characters in Tan’s fiction. The Sino–Japanese war of 1941-45 causes great hardship and sorrows to the people of China especially those living in Shanghai, Kweilin, Chungking and Nanking. Tan vividly captures the social history of that period as we see in this narration:

As soon as someone shouted: ‘Japanese planes! Disaster is coming!’ the people began to ‘push and run.’ The airplane noise became louder until they were on our backs, soaring like elephants... and we knew the bullets and bombs were coming. Then everyone around us began to fall... I was falling too...but because my stomach was so big, I had to be curled upon my side (The Joy Luck Club 268).

Tan’s narratives are inextricably linked with the history of her native country, China. Yiorgos D. Kalogerass’s comment on Nicholas Gage’s novel Eleni² is very relevant in this context. He remarks: “...the narrativisation of one’s ethnic history, to the extent that it reflects on one’s life story is not simply an act of establishing roots, or an act of filiopietism, attesting proudly to one’s difference; it can be read as an act contributing to the empowerment of the subject and of the text.” (College Literature 32). What is primarily at stake in immigrant and ethnic personal narratives is the production and constitution of text and subject within the hegemonic
cultural/ideology. In Tan’s novels about mothers and daughters, history is not narrativised only in the passing, but becomes the context of personal tragedies. The devastation of the world outside is seen to echo the tragedy in human lives of Suyuan Woo, Lindo Jong and Weilie. In other words, personal and national history appear closely interrelated. The unimaginable tragedy of living babies being separated from their mothers due to a cataclysmic war, is inherent in Tan’s novels. We see this in the sad story of Suyuan Woo and Kwan. In The Joy Luck Club, Tan describes the hardships of the Chinese woman, Suyuan Woo fleeing from Chungking, during the Sino - Japanese War. She is forced to abandon her babies on the roadside because she was too sick to carry them any further. No one came to her aid, despite her fervent and tearful pleas to the hysterical passers by. In The Hundred Secret Senses, Kwan is similarly abandoned by her father during the communist takeover of China. A similar story is recorded by Elaine Kim in the short story ‘War Story’ and Janice Mirikitani’s “Shadow in Stone” which mention the legacy of deep emotional, physical and economic consequences to the women who survived war.

The paranoia of suffering and cruelty generated by political aggressions; poverty, hardships, and inconveniences caused to ordinary human existence during wartime; great loss of wealth,
family and property as a result of political conflicts are ubiquitous in Asian American writings, be it Chinese-, Japanese-, Korean-, Vietnamese- or Cambodian- American. The Korean American writer and critic Kim emphasizes in her short story ('War Story') in the collection *Making Waves*: “There should never be wars. Its the most blameless ones who are sacrificed” (89). This same horror is expressed by another Chinese American writer K.Kam in the short story 'The Hopeland': “1934-41 ... continuing horror in China ... corpses of families trampled in a stampede flight from a Japanese raid. Clothing had been torn from some of the dead” (92).

Contemporary Asian American writers use history in a method akin to new historicism to give their own version about historical facts which they consider to have been distorted by racist representations. We therefore hear Tan speaking through her protagonist in *The Kitchen God's Wife* about the beginnings of world War I. Pearl is reprimanded by her mother for imbibing the distorted history of her native land:“ ‘you were always correcting me’ ... ‘oh, Mammy that is Chinese history. This is American history’ ” (213). According to Weli, “World War Two started...in China, with a late-night shooting up north in Peking” (220). The ‘true’ picture was very different from the heroic victorious stories circulated by the media. One night the Chinese planes took off towards the Shangai harbour, which was “swollen with Chinese boats.” The pilots were
hoping to take the enemy by surprise. But before they could reach the harbour "Japanese planes dropped from the darker sky above." The enemy had already received information about the planned Chinese attack. The Japanese planes chased the Chinese planes and in the confusion, taken by surprise, the Chinese pilots hurriedly dropped their bombs. The "bombs fell on Shangai that night, on the roofs of houses and stores, on the street cars, on hundreds of people, all Chinese" (273-78). The irony and sadness is that "the Japanese navy — their boats still floated on the water" (238).

The deteriorating social conditions, abetted by, a worsening economy are depicted by the novelist through the difficulties encountered by Suyuan Woo and Weilie during the war, as they flee the invading army. Suyuan Woo had "sewn money and jewellery into the lining of her dress... to barter rides all the way to Chung King from Kweilin" (Joy Luck Club 281). After three days of travelling on foot with the twin babies, she became physically ill and exhausted. “She didn’t have the strength to carry the babies any further”. Just before leaving the babies on the roadside, "she stuffed their shirts with money and jewellery so that they would be picked up and looked after" (282).

The deteriorating economy, an inevitable consequence of wartime conditions is explicitly stated by an official in Kitchen God’s
Wife: "everything is falling down ... last year's money is worth half today. That's how you know if we are winning or losing the war... the enemy can control the country just by controlling money" (333-34). Weilie has to pay exorbitant prices for basic amenities and facilities when her husband is transferred from place to place. The Kuomintang (Imperial) Air Force could not provide the officers and their families with comfortable living facilities. So Weilie spent her dowry money on renting a decent room for Wen Fu and herself. As she was pregnant, she also paid heavily for the services of a cook and a cleaning servant. She even prepared sumptuous banquets with her dowry money, for "the young pilots who flew to their deaths heroically." They had known their airplanes were not fast enough "before they even left the ground". They even knew that "they did not have enough training... to avoid the Japanese fighter planes..." (Kitchen God's Wife 255).

The situation in China in those days was taonan, there was fast spreading epidemic of moral laxity among the people and the entire nation had become dishonest, cunning, greedy for survival. Children and women suffered. Babies were separated from their mothers through death or wartime hysteria. In The Joy Luck Club, Tan narrates the poignant tale of twin babies Wang Chu Yu and Wang Wan Hwa (both girls) who were abandoned by their sick mother on the road to Chungking. Their father was already dead
fighting the Japanese. With the loss of their mother they became orphans. They are accidentally found and looked after by a Muslim peasant couple. It is only twenty or more years later that they are discovered by their mother but before a much anticipated meeting could take place, the mother Suyuan Woo dies. Finally it is their half sister June Mei who comes to see them in China and tells them about their mother. Similarly Weilie lost all three of her children during the war. When her second baby dies, Weilie acknowledges the sad truth that Yiku would have survived, if there had been no war. Kwan is deprived of her father as a result of the Communist Revolution in 1949. She lost her mother when she was about four, to a terminal illness and was looked after by her mother’s sister. Her father Jack Yee, an engineer, went to Hong Kong seeking employment. The communist Revolution in 1949, disallowed him entry into his homeland and he migrated to America “with a heavy heart...to start a new life and forget about the sadness he left behind” (Hundred Secret Senses 5). It is at his deathbed that the existence of Kwan is revealed by him to his second wife Louise Kenfield. Kwan never saw her father alive.

Tan’s use of history and the socio historical conditions of China in 1920’s and 40’s is brought into the present through the mode of memory narratives. In the first two novels, memory is used as a bridge between the past and the present, which in ethnic
literature belongs to two worlds: native and domicile. The Chinese mothers, through their recollections, provide the historical link both of time and place: between past and present as well as between China and America. In the third novel The Hundred Secret Senses the 'link' is established by 'Yin people' who tell Kwan about her past life as well as about those living around her. In this novel the history of China in the 1840's to the 1900 forms the backdrop against which Tan weaves her narrative about Olivia Bishop and her Chinese half-sister Kwan. Even Olivia, who at first is a sceptic, comes to believe in the power of 'Yin' people. The sense of the past in the present is ubiquitous in Tan's fiction. In the opinion of the Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris, "hybridity in the present is constantly struggling to free itself from a past which stressed ancestry, and which valued the 'pure' over its threatening opposite the 'composite' " (The Empire Writes Back 35-36). It replaces temporal linearity with a spatial plurality. This is most remarkably seen in The Hundred Secret Senses. In Kwan's reincarnated existence she makes constant journeys into her past previous life, when she was another person in another place/country with the name Nunumu or even earlier, Buncake. Kwan's story about her previous life as Nunumu, is pieced together by her gift of the hundred secret senses. The history of China-Tai Ping Rebellion, Heavenly King, defeat by Manchu soldiers and the atrocities
committed on Jesus worshippers in the village of Changmian in 1860-1864 become cause for tragedy in the life of Nunumu. She and her friend Miss. Banner were both killed by Manchu soldiers the night in 1864 when the Heavenly King was defeated. In moving to an earlier period in Chinese history Tan makes a conscious effort to portray the socio-historical, sociocultural milieu and succeeds in the ambitious task. What Olivia has gathered from Kwan’s stories about China since her arrival in America as an eighteen-year-old girl, is actually seen and experienced by Olivia during her visit to China accompanied by Kwan, now fifty years old, and Olivia’s estranged husband Simon.

Again as in Joy Luck Club and Kitchen God’s Wife Tan makes use of social history of China as source material to focus on the gruesome killing of human beings by their own species in the name of religion, country, race or nationality. If in the earlier novels it is the Japanese who are the perpetuators of violent crimes, in The Hundred Secret Senses, it is the Manchu soldiers who kill their own race in the name of religion. We are told that the night the Heavenly King was defeated (1864) the Manchus “slaughtered all the God worshippers” (192). That day Nunumu and her friend Miss Banner were killed as well as their lovers Zeng and Yiban.
The decade of the rule of Heavenly King in Northern China, and the defeat of the leader by the Manchus is narrated by Tan with brevity and matter-of-factness:

Ten years before, the Heavenly King had sent a tide of death from the mountains to the coast. Blood flowed, millions died. Now the tide was returning. In the port cities, the Manchus, burning down houses, digging up graves, destroying heaven and earth at the same time (193).

In the narration of this historical event, the ethnic writer in Tan does not miss the opportunity to counter racist stereotyping. She does this by the portrayal of the English officer named General Cape in *The Hundred Secret Senses*. This character is created as prototype of the historical figure of General James Hope who was instrumental in defeating the Heavenly King by openly lending support to Manchu revolutionaries. The Tai Ping followers were cheated into defeat, for they had counted on the support of the British traders/soldiers. All of them being Jesus worshippers, Tai Ping followers thought they would be aided by the white Christians in their battle against the civil/heathens the Manchus. The infidelity of the British shocked the Heavenly King and the Tai Ping followers.
The character of General Cape also explodes the myth of ideological racism. He is portrayed as the most cruel person in the entire novel. Tan gives details about his character. He took sadistic pleasure in inflicting cruelty upon fellow missionaries. "Cut out this dead man's legs and cook it over fire" Cape barked out these orders to the soldiers. "The Jesus worshipers cried and tried to leave. Cape warned them that if they did not watch, their right hand would be similarly cut and cooked. So they stayed and watched. They laughed and vomited at the same time" (Hundred Secret Senses 297).

Tan's use of anecdotal versions of Chinese history finds parallels in Bharati Mukherjee's treatment of historical/political context in her novels, The Tiger's Daughter, Jasmine and The Holder of the World. Just as Tan moves farther down the centuries (1850-1900) in her recent novel The Hundred Secret Senses, similarly Mukherjee uses the history of seventeenth and eighteenth century India as background for her novel The Holder of the World. The horror of politically motivated conflicts on innocents, (earlier quoted) is also depicted in Mukherjee's novel. The Holder of the World in the following passage:

And then she [Hannah] saw a fierce destruction gather upon the beach... a small army... of the men making their way across the wind torn roadway to the half-
beached hulk boat carrying Gabriel Legge. The bodies of *firangi* sailors, most of them drowned but some still struggling, were chopped and speared as the soldiers passed. It was a scene of mass murder on top of a furious cyclone (203).

In the fictional representation of historical events of the seventeenth to the twentieth century, Tan and Mukherjee are concerned about the tragedies caused by these events in the lives of individuals: the loss of wealth, land and loved ones; the trauma and fear of wartime conditions upon the psyche as well as the deteriorating social economy, the moral and ethical values of a nation, a village or a region.

In *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Jasmine* political events and turmoils bring tragedies to the lives of Tara and Jasmine. In the process of narration Mukherjee makes constant shifts between the past and the present, between India and America and in the process brings out the ethnic culture against an American backdrop. Just as Tara is constantly being haunted by her Indianess in America, and her Americanness in India. In the same way Jasmine, in spite of changing identities in order to survive in westernised America, is nevertheless, haunted by her past as Jyoti a village girl, and Jasmine – wife of Prakash Vijh, after she becomes Jase and Jane.
The opening in *The Tiger's Daughter* is set in the present, represented by the Hotel Catelli to Continental, on Camac Street, Calcutta in the seventies. It is described as being "the navel of the universe" (3) and it is the city where the novelist locates the climax of the story. The city of Calcutta is the hubub of dramatic action of the plot, the city, which is caught in the pangs of a political rebirth. Tara and her friends are part of this city from which there is no escape. Against this present, Mukherjee begins her tale in the pre-independent era- "1879 by the English calendar, on a Monday in Sravan, the month of heaviest rains, when Hari Lal Banerjee of Pachapara was standing under a wedding canopy on the roof of his house..." (4) conducting the wedding of his daughter. She is the great-grandmother of Tara Banerjee, daughter of Bengal Tiger. Bengal was already getting ready for a major political upheaval even in the 1880's as we are told that "two summers after his daughter's wedding he had ridden out of his compound to stop a feud, and someone with a knife had leaped on him from flowering bushes." With the independence of India and the partition of the country, Pachapara became "foreign soil" and "Hari Lal's marble study the parlour of a Moslem butcher" (7). The "anatomies of change" that was perceived, would take its course, no one would be able to prevent it. It would claim the lives of many more people in the future. Tara also becomes a victim at the end of the novel.
In the novel *Jasmine*, the past is Jyothi's childhood in the small village of Hasnapur, Jullundar (Punjab), her marriage to Prakash and her metamorphosis from the timid Jyothi to the bolder Jasmine. It had been effected Pygmalion-like by Prakash. The present is her life as Jane Ripplemeyer, live-in companion to Bud Ripplemeyer, an Iowa banker.

The story of Tara Benerjee is in a way the story of Bharathi Mukherjee herself, a Bengali Brahmin from Calcutta belonging to the aristocratic, educated elite. Her visit to India is replete with autobiographical overtones. It recalls the writer's own "return" to Calcutta after her marriage to Clark Blaise which has been mentioned in the *Days and Nights*. Tara's stay in her native land is by no means easy or eventless. She feels a "foreigner" among her Camac Street elite Bengali friends.

Mukherjee juxtaposes the changing new political situation in Bengal through the microcosm of Calcutta city. On one hand lies the Bengal of filmmaker Satyajith Ray, "children running through cool green spaced lawns, aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty palaces;" on the other hand was the Calcutta of the present which she hated for its poverty and squalor: "kids eating yoghurt off dirty sidewalks" (*The Tiger's Daughter* 105). Tara also sees the city marked by communal riots, political demonstrations, poverty, violence and human suffering.
The change in the political climate of Calcutta is portrayed through the eyes of the prodigal Tara, “the imprisoned gigantic spirit” within the city beginning to move “towns, buildings, men—slowly altering their shapes” (9). Calcutta is the vortex of this spirit of change and no one, neither Tara, her father, the Bengal Tiger, nor her elite Brahmin friends, Reena or Jyathi, can escape its centrifugal force of violence. It “absorbs and digests them, and waits” (4). Veronica Brady in her essay, “Straddling Two Cultures” compares Mukherjee’s involvement with Calcutta to “something like London for Dickens: a kind of fate, a totality which cannot be grasped yet which overwhelms, absorbs and in its own strange way, empowers its inhabitants to live out its life” (CRNLE 1-2, 113).

In Mukherjee’s novel The Tiger’s Daughter, the Indian past and the American present have different connotations for Tara. It is in the ambiguities of the present, that the novel’s characters must struggle to find a place and purpose. As Brady remarks “the contrast with the certainties of the past gives dramatic point to this struggle which is at once personal and historical, ethical rather than aesthetic and gives the novel its pent up, slowly mounting but monumental power” (CRNLE 113).

Tara who returns to this city after an absence of seven years is only twenty three years old, but she feels its weight and inevitability. It is reiterated no doubt by changes she has brought
about in her own life so that she feels an “outsider.” The rapid sociopolitical, historical changes taking place all over Bengal which was in the throes of Communism, is epitomised in the life of Joyonto Chowdhury, a successful businessman. He has given up his business and his compound has been taken over by squatters. His presence in the novel suggests the impossibility of any kind of resolution in the sociopolitical situation. What he has to show Tara is an image of death. He takes her one evening to the funeral pyres by the river, and on another occasion to see the ruin the squatters have made of his house.

Mukherjee uses radio broadcasts to provide the political context of this novel whereas, Tan uses photographs and memories to colour the narratives with historical events. One afternoon at the Catteli Continental, Tara was having coffee with her friends. Pronob who had been unusually somber, withdrawn and severe, instead of answering their arguments with his own beliefs, shouted “I want to listen to the English news” (56). The news broadcast informs the listeners: “There have been isolated skirmishes between the police and the demonstrators on Rashbehari Avenue...Eight men have been taken to hospital.” On hearing this Tara “suspected she was in the presence of history” (57). Pronob informs Tara the “awful news” that “farms” were being “looted,” “landlords being clubbed to death.” The news reader again continues: “the marchers are
proceeding in somewhat disorderly fashion..." (58) "the first phalanx of the procession is nearing the Catelli-Continental Hotel" (59); "Heavy fighting has broken out in the Hindustan Road" (61). Tara's apprehensions give way to horrifying fear as she wonders how she could reach the safety of her parents' home on Camac Street. The demonstration finally broke rank, but not before they had "emptied garbage from the municipal dustbins... overturned cars parked at the curve" and sluged the doorkeeper of the Hotel (62). The volatile political and social situations depicted by Mukherjee throughout the novel *The Tiger's Daughter* climaxes in the death of Jayanto, and the suggestion of a similar fate for Tara, who locks herself inside a car parked amidst a rioting mob, which is wrecking havoc with soda bottles and burning torches.

Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* also makes use of political events to narrate the tragedy caused by these events in human existence. Directly or indirectly, historical conflicts sparked by religious intolerance within India determine the problematic constitution of Jasmine's shifting individuality. Given a world where violence is ubiquitous, persecution and exploitation constants, Jasmine's plurality of selves is her only strategy for survival. Beneath the cultivated facade of detachment, Jasmine is haunted by memories of her past in Hasnapur village, her father, the astrologer's
prediction and her life as Prakash's wife. The narrator of this novel speaks out:

Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine. Duff's day mummy and Wylies aupair in Manhattan; that Jasmine isn't this Jane Ripplemeyer. And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster; which of us has held a dying husband and, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms?

(Jasmine 127).

In the novel Jasmine, Mukherjee parallels the violence of the Khalistan movement that is responsible for Jasmine's widowhood and her subsequent displacement, to the bloody communal riots between Hindus and Muslims at the time of India's independence in 1947. Despite her distance from this historical event, which rendered millions of people homeless and destitute overnight, the narrator can still empathize with her parents' anguished memories of the Partition that forced them to leave their ancestral home in Lahore and flee to Punjab. The fragmentations of nation and the family as well as the haunting journey from terror to refuge have seeped into Jasmine's consciousness -- "the loss survives in the instant replay of family story: forever Lahore smokes, forever my parents flee" (41).
If Jasmine's parents' tragedy begins with Partition (1947-48), Jasmine's begins with the Khalistan Liberation Movement, a Sikh organization in the Punjab, aimed at driving out the Hindus from Punjab and declaring the state as independent Khalistan. The Khalsa Lions, a Sikh terrorist group especially targeted young Hindu men. So Jasmine's husband Prakash becomes a victim in a hasty bomb shoot-out while the couple were returning from shopping one night. Jasmine identifies the killer as Sukwinder who used to visit them often. Jasmine becomes a widow at the age of seventeen. Mukherjee describes the socio-political context of Punjab in these words of the narrator:

Sikh nationalist had gotten out of hand... the Khalsa terrorists on mopeds were picking off the moderates, the police, innocent Hindus. Vancouver Singh's farm was a safe house for drug pushers and gunners... Hindus would be smart to get out while they could... The whole country was a bloody mess... (63-64).

Mukherjee renders a matter-of-fact account of the anti-Hindu activities indulged in by Sikh terrorists:

Even in Hasnapur things started to happen... a transistor radio blew up in the bazaar. A busload of Hindus on their way to a shrine to Lord Ganapati was
hijacked and all males shot dead at point-blank range (64).

That Mukherjee was concerned about this communal war, which gripped Indian politics in the decade from 1970 to 1980 is evident in her non-fictional work *Sound and Terror*. Sikh terrorism and its impact on Hindu families are portrayed in her short story "The Management of Grief" included in her collection, *The Middleman and Other Stories*.

In a world of restlessness and uncertainties of immigrant citizenship, history offers a stable base on which to search for one's past identity and perhaps that is what Bharti Mukherjee is looking for in *The Holder of the World*. V.C. Sudheer in his essay "History and the past reality in *The Holder of the World*" states:

> The novel is a bridge between the past and the present. The author has cleverly juxtaposed the apparently conflicting worlds of luxuriant past and the mechanized present. The search for the precious diamond 'Emperor's tear' seems to be a search for the glorious past (213).

In the process, the narrator Beigh Masters is able to trace her connections to Hannah Easton, the Salem Bibi. We see that Mukherjee's treatment of the past is different from that of Tan. The past in Tan is unhappy, war torn, and desperate whereas the
present is full of hope, happiness and prosperity. In Mukherjee's two novels *The Tigers Daughter* and *The Holder of the World* the past signifies certainties, stability, luxury. Tara's parental home and surroundings in Calcutta bring her a sense of stability amidst Calcutta's climate of political upheavals. Hannah's past in the Fitch household is peaceful and pious. But the novelist depicts a troubled past also: in the life of Hannah in Nipmuc Country of her childhood, in the story of Jasmine/Jyoti as well as Debby.

Bharti Mukherjee's sixth novel *The Holder of the World* tells the story of Hannah Easton, born in 1670 in Massachusetts Bay Colony, America, and traces her migration to England, India, and then back to her native land. In this novel, Mukherjee recreates a piece of Raj history of the seventeenth and eighteenth century and in doing so she joins other novelists from native India, such as Manohar Malgonkar in *The Princes, The Devil's Wind*, Kamala Markandaya in *The Golden Honeycomb* and more recently Gita Mehta in *Raj*.

With meticulous detail—historical, sociohistorical as well as sociocultural, Mukherjee laboriously pieces together Hannah's history of "three continents and thirty years" through library and museum archives in the novel *The Holder of the World*. While the novels hitherto analysed have shown the novelists recreating history through the art of memory, photographs and "world of yin,"
this novel is different. Here the novelist recreates history through computers. Venn Iyer, the friend of the narrator/researcher Beigh Masters, is a computer engineer who delights in his task of recreating history. He and his companions attempt to create the greatest “data plasma” by constructing a model of historical or imaginative reality on a data trail by programming in the undisputable facts. “Venn inputs data not just boldly” but, as the narrator of the novel says, “more mischievously as he compresses into his super computer, Hannah, Gabriel, Aurangzeb, Raja Jaydev Singh, soldiers, governors, cabin boys, Coromandel, St. Sebastian and so on for a perfect design - Nirvana as he calls it” (The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee 214).

With superb poetic sense, Mukherjee reconstructs the past reality through the story of Hannah, the Salem Bibi. In chronological order she begins the story from Brookefield, Massachusetts in 1632 with the arrival of the first English colonist Charles Jonathan Samuel Masters in Massachusetts to Salem, to London, to India and then back to Salem, spanning a period of three decades.

The Holder of the World, like the novels of Tan, also carries in the subtext “a strident denominations of greed for power, violence and war which generate disharmony in society and destroy precious human lives in the name of ideals which are hollow” (The Fiction of
Bharati Mukherjee 215). It could be termed an anti-war novel along with several others in this genre, like Norman Mailer's The Naked and The Dead, Joseph Heller's Catch 22, and Graham Greene's The Quiet American. It is Hannah who is made to perceive and sensitively respond to these distinctive traits of human beings.

In the early part of the novel, Mukherjee depicts a slice of American history. Hannah's life story begins from Brookefield the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which was the first colony to be established by the Puritans in America. Hannah's life is changed completely by the night the Nipmuc warriors seized and chased away the settler community. In this aspect the novel seems to resemble Tan's novels in the way political turmoils affect the course of human existence. As it happened in the case of Suyuan Woo, Weili, Kwan, so it is with Hannah, her widowed mother elopes with the Nipmuc chief and Hannah reaches the home of another Puritan family.

In the novel The Holder of the World, Mukherjee depicts Coromandel Coast in the last decades of the eighteenth century (1690 –1700) through the narrative viewpoint of Hannah. According to the narrator:

Purity was no longer valued as the end of human effort or the goal of social structure. Shrines and cutthroats walked the streets in open defiance of common
decency, crafty devious merchants without a ha’ penny of Godfear piling ou... and pleading too great a poverty to contribute to the Sunday offering (41).

Aurangzeb’s seige of Devgad from Raja Jaydev Singh, its ruler, is described by Mukherjee in all its gory details; the carnage through Hannah’s narration of the battlefield:

The elephant’s feet thick with brown blood and with the fresh blood from bodies still living when the foot had come down upon them, causing blood to spurt across the elephants chest, up to the level of his eyes... tankards of blood, had churned the ground to mud (248).

The killings of the Hindus in Devgad by the Muslims is reminiscent of the conflict between the two religious communities during the later days (partition, 1942 uprisings in Malabar etc). In dramatising this communal conflict, Mukherjee has captured the ubiquitous thorn in the flesh of Indian polity. The tragedy is no less gruesome than the class war depicted in The Tiger’s Daughter or the Sikh-Hindu conflict that begins the tragedy in the life of Jasmine in the novel by that name. Throughout, the novelist’s voice speaks through Hannah’s mouth: “Humans are beasts, base-driven, venomous, unfeeling” (246-47). Gabriel Legge, Marquis, Cephus, Samuel Higginbotham, Aurangzeb are some of the specimens that
fit the label given by Hannah. The only exceptions are Henry Hedges and perhaps Raja Jaydev Singh.

Walter Shear in the essay "Generational Differences and the Diaspora in The Joy Luck Club opines that, the subject matter of minority literature is social history, not necessarily by design but by definition' (Critique xxxiv 215). The social history of this port city in the Coromandel Coast is described by Mukherjee as being made up of the interaction of three different communities - the Hindus, the Muslims and the Christians and the subtle interweaving of distinct cultures. It is best exemplified in the changing identities that Hannah affects during her stay in India from 1695 to 1702. She arrives as Mrs. Hannah Gabriel Legge Easton, becomes mistress to King Jaydev Singh of Devgad and calls herself Salem Bibi; then as Precious-as-Pearl in Emperor Aurangzeb's harem. Roopconda, Muslipatnam, Sonapatnam, St. Sebastian are the locales chosen by the novelist to fictionalise the historical period of Aurangzeb's last ruling days.

In this novel Bharati Mukherjee endeavours to give a realistic portrayal of early British rule in India through the microcosm of these cities. According to the writer, the main purpose of British advent to India was neither to breed or to colonize, but to convert, plunder and to enrich themselves by India's rich resources. The life of Gabriel Legge, Marquis, Cephus Pyne all show how the
‘civilised’ people of an imperial country had become filled with lust, money and pleasure. Mukherjee throws light on superstitions, widow marriage, sati practice and the strategies on the part of the rulers to thwart any attempts to promote Hindu-Muslim unity.

Mukherjee describes the life among the English men on the Coromandal Coast as being one of violence and lust. In the novel *The Holder of The World* she writes: “Internecine homicide among East India factors,.could easily be blamed on tropical passion, drink …” According to Beigh Masters “those were adventurous men with nothing to lose, driven bymercantile lust, in a time and place that provided cover for base design” (143). Factors came out of these encounters with a village India, reeling with fevers,distempers, malaria, fatigue. Malaria carried off half the factors and probably left the survivors victims of fevers the rest of their lives. Many didn’t make it back to the fort at all, dying within hours from generic ‘tropical plagues’ which encompassed the full range of viral disease from rabid- bat and bug bites to polio and waterborne dysenteries. This is recorded in the log books maintained by Gabriel Legge in his capacity as Chief factor in Fort St. Sebastian.

There was higher prohibition in an “abstemious country under the grip of the orthodox Grand Mughal Aurangzeb” (196); though people like Attila Coyesyry ran public houses and were allowed liquor concession. In Black Town, the Muslim overloads
tolerated the so-called punch houses (liquor shops/clubs) for the Christians and gentiles meaning Hindus and various other half-eastern sects. Suchikhana was the name of the punch house owned by Attila a Transylvanian Protestant who had followed the Turk-hating mercenary trail that led him to Coromandel coast. “Suchikhana” was a social club, a meeting hall for “those who had rejected the Company’s paternalistic and poorly rewarded attentions.” It was frequented by freemen pirates, interlopers, adulterers and privateers who could barter information or schedules, routes and flag protections “for ships laden with enough gold to be for their taking” (147). This was important information for pirates like Gabriel and Marquis.

Marquis de Mussy, was a baker’s son, and a detractor from the company, he had grown wealthy with his seafaring adventures. Hannah had been warned by Sarah and Martha to avoid Marquis. According to the two English women, he was a man of sinister plans, a mercenary who fought for fat fees on behalf of any Muslim Nawab or Hindu raja who had enough jewels to hire him. When Gabriel grew unhappy with his positions at the Company, aided no doubt by a jealous colleague, he quit his job as Factor and joined the Marquis as a pirate. His irritation with Cephus Prynne, the chief factor fanned into a devouring hatred and culminated in the murder of Cephus. The company however, chose to implicate two-headed
Ravanna a local cutthroat with the crime and had him punished most cruelly: "he went to his agonized death slowly lowered upon the sharpened shul, surviving to hear loud cheering as the gory spike burst from his bowels and out the very eye socket of his phantom head" (158), but not before cursing the Governor Morad Farah, Haider Beg, the company governor and other Factors who had testified to have seen him outside Attila's distillery the night of Cephus Prynne's disappearance.

The jealousy of Samuel Higgins Botham who one day saw Gabriel Legge being transported in royal splendour in Norwich Grays and gold band sent word to Nawab Haider Beg and masterminded an intrigue of revenge from which Gabriel escaped. But the "explosive-packed cart" meant to burn Legge's cotton, blew up in the alley of Black Town. "Shops and huts blazed.. Then, women and children sprouted wings of flame. Their screams and curses were heard, soon enough in every village, every factory, every home in Roopconda state" (194). Raja Jaydev Singh, meditating on the roof of his Panpur Palace vowed revenge.

"Sonapatnam's shores of blood and pain" (205) witnessed the gruesome death of the two pirates Marquis and Gabriel Legge sometime in 1697. It was a bloody carnage inflicted by Nawab Haider Beg's Muslim men who were determined to kill the firangi sailors. Hannah became a fleeing refugee in the Panpur Palace, with
the help of her loyal servant Bhagmati who dressed her in the Hindu dress of sari and brought her to Raja Jaydev's palace.

History was to follow Hannah, even after she became a widow. In Panpur Palace she found love in the arms of Raja Jaydev Singh who courted her for fourteen days Aurangzeb, a ruler active, despite his age, found it the most opportune moment to lay a seige on Devgad. Hannah's life as Salem Bibi to the Raja ended with the military move of the Mughal Emperor. It resulted in the physical handicappedness of Jaydev Singh. He mounted a suicidal attack on Aurangzeb’s fort and met a sorrowful end, which was seen unwillingly by Hannah in the company of Aurangzeb who had included her in his Zenna for women.

The Devgad battle was Aurangzeb’s last great victory writes Mukherjee through the narrator Beigh Masters. The Great Mughal, "the World Taker" we are told, soon died of a “kind of plague” suffering thousand small wounds all over his body. He left an emptied treasury from fighting Sikhs on the north west, Muslims on the east, the freebooters and sharp traders of the various European Chartered Companies (English, Portuguese, Dutch) on the southern coasts. He died at the age of eighty-nine, seven years after Hannah came to him and he made her the ‘Pearl- of- the- Crown.’ Having alienated all competent heirs, “he carried the soul of the Mughal Empire with him to his grave.” Mukherjee provides a realistic
portrayal of the political situation in India in the decade 1690 to 1700 which she calls: "the vacuum that invited the British in" (*The Holder of the World* 277).

The temporal trajectory of history, of events unfolding in time, places necessary boundaries around the past, present and future. When one adds a spatial dimension, for instance, migrations, into this temporal unfolding, the intersection of geography with history opens up new eras for imaginative exploration. Katrak remarks that "returning home through the imagination, re-creating home in narrative, creates a simultaneous present of being both here and there." (*Modern Fiction Studies* 202). This is evident in Tan's novels as her first generation Chinese immigrants recreate their native land for their daughters in America- locales, houses, architecture, décor, market places all become subjects for her ethnic writings. For instance the house of Lindo Jong's future in-laws where she is sent to stay at the age of twelve in the village of Taiyuan:

Stone-and-wood gateway.. a large courtyard with three or four rows of small low buildings. . . Behind these modest buildings stood the main house. . . four stories, one for each generation, great-grand parents, grand parents, parents and children. . . The first level was built of river rocks held together by straw-filled mud. The second and third levels were made of smooth
bricks with an exposed wail way . . . and the top level had gray slab walls topped with a red tile roof . . . imperial dragon at the corner of the roof (Joy Luck Club 54).

The novel abounds in details of décor such as sofas and chairs for entertaining guests and honouring ancestors: "made out of very thick dark gleaming wood, carved in Chinese style with claw feet and long- life characters running around the border" (The Kitchen God’s Wife 183).

The altar of the Kitchen God that belonged to Auntie Du is given as her parting gift to Pearl. Weili gives it to her after Auntie Du’s funeral. The entire assemblage consisted of an “altar about the size of an upturned drawer, painted in red lacquer . . . two ornate columns in front” as well as “two electric candles made out of gold and red plastic and topped by red christmas tree bulbs for flames.” Running down the sides are “wooden panels decorated with gold Chinese characters” (The Kitchen God’ Wife 58). Inside the altar is the Kitchen God deity, in a seated position “almost cartoon like” seated in “regal splendour” “holding a quill in one hand, a tablet in the other” he has “twirling whiskers, shaped like smooth, tapered black whip.” (58)

Market places are of special interest to most social and ethnic writers as it offers a microcosm of the socio cultural milieu of a
period and a place. Tan describes the market place in Tsungiuing Island during the Chinese New Year.

The market place was already crowded at eleven o’clock that morning... Both tables were full of people with cold, red cheeks, poised over steaming bowls, and a dozen mix (were) squatting in the ground, bowls balanced between their legs . . . usual stall that sold fruits and vegetables, eggs and live chicken . . . . Red banner hung everywhere . . . Little Gong and Little Fao [Welige’s cousins] were watching a monkey dancing. At the end of the show, they threw two coppers on the ground. The monkey picked them up . . . then handed the money to its owner, who gave him two dried lizards that he crunched on right away. (Kitchen God’s Wife 146)

Tan also makes reference to a ‘typical’ Asian market on Clement Street in San Francisco, where Pearl’s mother always did her shopping. “its one of the typical Asian markets in the neighborhood” narrates Pearl . . “people standing outside, pinching and picking through piles of fruits and vegetables, hundred – pound bags of rice stacked like giant bricks against the window” (53).

According to Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong in “Sugar sisterhood,” the cultural details in Tan’s fiction served their purpose not of
referential accuracy but as "gestures" to the mainstream readers that the author is familiar with the ethnic culture. She calls these details "‘markers of authenticity’ whose function is to create an ‘oriental effect’ by signalling a reassuring affinity between the given work and American perceptions of what the orient is\should be" (The Ethnic Canon 187). Hence she terms Tan’s fiction as quasi-ethnographic discourse. Wong further reiterates that “paradoxical as it may seem, an author with more direct historical knowledge about China than Amy Tan may well be less successful in convincing the American reading public of the ‘truthfulness’ of her picture, since, in such a case, the element of cultural mediations would be correspondingly weaker” (199).

Mukherjee’s novels envision a different type of negotiation of culture, history and geography. Her novels depict the contemporary reality of Asian immigrants in America. Except for her first novel The Tiger’s Daughter there is very little detailed descriptions of geographic locales or history of India. The Holder of the World stands as an exception. Nevertheless, Indian culture, Hindu religion, gods, goddesses of Bengali Brahmins, Hindu mythological legends, myth etc pervade her five novels: The Tiger’s Daughters, Wife, Jasmine, The Holder of the World, Leave it to Me, through the ethos of the ethnic.
The religious rituals of Bengali Brahmins are portrayed through the character of Mrs Aarti Banerjee, Tara’s mother. It is the source of strength for a homesick young daughter in New York, to visualize the picture of her mother seated in her “puja room” on a muzapur rug...praying to rows of gods and goddesses.” She told her friends there “I just can’t pray here. It doesn’t come” (49). Mukherjee details the architecture and decor of such prayer rooms in Bengal: “bright, airy, and curtainless, floor of white marble, streaked gently with grey.” In the morning, sunlight rushing in through the windows, “the floor seemed to dance like waves.” There was a “marble platform” on which stood “five small hand-carved tables “covered with silk table cloths. “On these tables were brass and silver deities wearing fresh garlands” (The Tiger’s Daughter 49). The purity of this room was strictly maintained by her mother. No non-Brahmin was allowed entry.

When Tara used to feel frightened or apprehensive due to cultural disorientations during her early days in Vassar, she used to pray to goddess Kali for strength. Goddess Durga and goddess Kali are popular goddesses among Bengalis. Mukherjee’s protagonists, Tara, Dimple, Jasmine believe in the powers of Kali. In Jasmine the protagonist evokes Kali’s name before she jumps upon her rapist killing him with a knife. The description Mukherjee offers of Jasmine at the moment she turns murderer of her rapist- “Kali-
"tongue-dripping blood" (118) is explicitly evocative of the goddess who is an avenging-goddess; she avenges men who do injustice or profane the sacredness of women. The idol of Lord Ganpati, which Jasmine had carried with her on the journey to America, is replaced by the more potent goddess Kali, when the protagonist is confronted with the racist-sexist ugliness of American society. In the novel Wife, Mukherjee's protagonist is seen to be obsessed with the wife of God Rama according to the Hindu epic Ramayana. Sita's wifely devotion, patience and tolerances are virtues that the Indian women are asked to emulate. Dimple in Wife wants to be a Sita-like wife to her husband. It is the ideal that she craves for, and which she ultimately subverts by killing her husband Amit. Hannah's introduction to the Rama-Sita-Ravanna story by Bhagmati is described in the novel The Holder of the World. She is especially taken up by the character of Sita.

Every people has a cultural part that sustains their spirits, asserts Elaine. H. Kim in her critical work Asian American Literature. The individual artist from Dante to Chaucer to Melville has never had to deny his roots in order to be accepted as an artist says Kim. The Asian American artist on the other hand has had to bid for acceptance in white society by turning his back on his/her part until "he evaporates into some plastic heaven where he is only a 'person' that is, a white man without a part." Becoming an
“honorary white person” entails self-depreciation and demigration of one’s cultural background and even one’s racial characteristics” (Kim 228). Amy Tan’s portrayal of sociohistorical, cultural and socio cultural aspects of Chinese people should be read as a conscious effort of the ethnic writer to legitimatise her ethnicity and establish ‘her voice’ in a white Anglo-American dominant society\culture. Both Tan and Mukherjee draw upon their respective ethniculture as backdrops for their narratives of immigrants. In the process they have rejected the stereotyped exoticisation of their culture and instead adopted a kind of documentary realism in the depiction of scenes, events, rituals, people and beliefs.

Marriage rituals in China of the pre-communist era is charmingly described by Tan in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God’s Wife*. For instance the wedding ceremonies of Lindo Jong in *The Joy Luck Club* officially conducted when she becomes sixteen years old. She had been betrothed to her would be- husband when a child of two. At the age of twelve she was sent by her parents to her in- law’s house (Huangs) so that she could be well trained in the likes and dislikes of her husband Tyan-yu. At the official wedding conducted after Lindo becomes sixteen years old, she is made to wear a “beautiful red dress” with a red scarf over her face so that she couldn’t see anything in front of her. “Someone took her
hand and guided her down a path" (58). A high official conducted the ceremony. He talked a lot about the virtues to be emulated by a dutiful wife. Then the matchmakers spoke aloud the birth dates of the groom and the bride and harmony as well as festivity. She, then took out a red candle “holding it up for everyone to see.” The candle had two ends for lighting. One end had the name of Tyan-yu, the other end Lindo. The matchmaker lighted both ends and declared “The marriage has began.” This candle was then handed over to a nervous – looking servant who was given the task of keeping a vigil all the night so that the candle would burn out; it would not be extinguished. The servant had to show the end product – a piece of black ash and then declare “This candle burned continuously at both ends without going out. This is a marriage that can never be broken.” According to Lindo “that candle was a marriage bond that was worth more than a Catholic promise not to divorce” (59).

The arranged marriage among the Chinese is more of economies than emotion. Weili tells of her marriage to Wen fu, who formerly was indulging in an affair with her cousin Peanut, but who changed his mind and opted for Weili when he heard of her rich father and the prospects of a handsome dowry. She says – “getting married in those days was like buying real estate. Here [America] you see a house you want to live in, you find a real estate agent. Back in China, you saw a rich family with a daughter, you found a
go – between who knew how to make a business deal" (Kitchen God’s Wife 164).

Before Weili’s marriage, her aunts took her to the rich merchant Tiang who was her father. He offered to give her a dowry of four thousand yuan along with “the furnishings of her and her husband’s room” (175). It was a handsome dowry in those days and it had to suffice the bride for a lifetime. Weili was asked to stay behind in Shanghai a month before the actual day, so that she could shop for her dowry items. Apart from the furniture she was given cutlery and crockery of two kinds. One for ordinary use and the other to be used for banquets. Then she bought “silver cups, for holding soy sauce,” for drinking tea, drinking wine, and a silver dish, only for “holding a little soup spoon.” Her chopsticks too were of best silver, “each pair connected by a little chain” (175). Altogether she went shopping seven days, each day for a particular kind of thing. Three days prior to the wedding Jiang Weili’s house (her uncles and aunts house) in Tsungming Island became crowded with relatives. Many presents had already been given to the prospective bride few days ago at a grand family dinner. It included costly jewellery such as the imperial jade earrings that had once belonged to her mother, an oval jade ring from her paternal grand mother, a gold necklace from her own father, two gold bracelets presented by the two aunts.
The Chinese culture also laid down norms regarding wifely duties which were patriarchal in tradition. Lindo Jong was trained by her in — laws from the age of twelve to be “an obedient wife.” She learnt to instruct the cook to kill a fresh chicken every morning and cook a bowl of soup with the juices from the cooked chicken without adding any water. She personally had to give this soup to her husband every morning “murmuring good wishes about his health” (*Joy Luck Club* 61). Every night she made a special tonic soup for her mother-in-law. It was made of eight ingredients and ensured long life for mothers (61).

A reviewer Gillespie comments about *The Kitchen God’s Wife*:

As a backdrop . . . we learn more of arranged marriages in Chinese societies and also about the kind of inter-wifely accommodation arranged by second or third wives and their offspring’s . . . we get to understand how, why and from where Chinese – American society evolved . . . Tan is handing us a key with no price tag and letting us open the brass-bolted door (*CLCY* 34).

The novels of Tan open to a world of the first half of the twentieth century in China, although her third novel can be predated to an earlier period of the eighteen sixties, the sociocultural milieu is the same; food, culinary norms, Chinese
beliefs, superstitions, ceremonies and festivities, architectural details, décor, Chinese wisdom and Kinship bonds.

As the stories of Chinese mothers unfold we are transported into an ethnic world. What strikes the reader first and foremost is the close kinship ties that exist in Chinese families. Ceremonies such as marriages, funerals, and festivals are occasions for the relatives to gather and exchange news about one another. In The Kitchen God’s Wife, we are told that three days before the wedding of Jiang Weili, her house on Tsungming Island was filled with relatives from far off places. The same novel opens with the engagement party of Aunt Helen’s son Bao-Bao in America. It was the third one, as the previous ones had been broken. Pearl and her husband Louie Brandt from far off San Francisco come to attend the engagement party of Bao-Bao in San Jose, braving a heavy traffic on the road. In fact Pearl’s husband, a Caucasian is often exasperated by these filial duties and obligations. It used to be a cause for arguments during the early days of their marriage. But soon, with the illness of Pearl, Louie gave in to his wife’s Chinese customs. Pearl comments on this issue: “When we were first married, Phil used to say that I was driven by blind devotion to fear and guilt. I would counter that he was selfish, that the things one had to do in life sometimes had nothing to do with what was fun or convenient” (The Kitchen God’s Wife 8). Pearl’s mother, Weili/
Winnie and Aunt Helen co-own a florist shop in Ross Alley, Chinatown. Tan briefly describes the China town: Al Fook barbershop on the right-hand side of the street, "a place that will send ancestor memorials back to China for a fee;" "farther down the street is the shop front of fortune-teller;" Sam Fook Trading Company a few doors down from the flower shop containing "good-luck charms and porcelain and wooden statues of Whiskey gods."
The name "Sam Fook" means, "triple blessing" in old Cantonese (13).

Weili's flower shop we are told is twenty years old. The counter is covered with "green- and-white bamboo lattice on the sides and wood grain on the top" (16). At the front of the shop are her prize flowers: philo dendrons, rubber plants, chicken-feet bushes, and miniature tangerine trees. "These are festooned with red banners, congratulating this business or that for its new store opening" (18). All the sayings written in gold Chinese characters are of her own inspiration, her thoughts about life and death, luck and hope. The Ding Ho flower shop has had success flowing through its doors all these years . . . "only now its less and less for shy brides and giddy grooms, and more and more for the sick, the old, and the dead" (19).

Chinese religious belief is a combination of the philosophies of Confucius, Tao, and Buddha. All the Chinese characters in Tan's
novels are Christians, though most of them still follow Chinese traditional rituals. This is because they are recent converts to Christianity and Chinese way of life is so much intertwined with Confucian philosophy that worshiping another God does not in any way hinder them from living Confucian way of life. This we see in the character of An-Mei-Hsu in *Joy Luck Club* and Weili / Winnie in *The Kitchen God’s Wife*. Weili is married to Louie, a Chinese American U.N. information Service Officer. This is her second marriage. Louie later became a Baptist minister and Winnie also joined him in his religious life. But after his death Weili has stopped going to church. It has been the same with Auntie Du. We are told by Pearl: “Although she attended the first Chinese Baptist Church for a number of years, both she and my mother stopped going right after my father died” (13).

Henry Tsai in his study on Chinese Experience explains the religious belief of the Chinese as being a combination of Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist teachings and rituals. Confucianism was more of a philosophy and allowed its followers the widest discretion in matters of personal belief, and paid little attention to matters of God and after life (*The Chinese American Experience* 43). This tolerance was unlike the Christian faith which demanded an unflinching faith in a fixed creed. Therefore Auntie Du has a Buddhist funeral arranged by her niece Aunt Helen and her friend Winnie, which
according to the narrator is not exactly Buddhist, "just all the superstitious rituals concerning attracting good luck and avoiding bad." Pearl remembers playing with "her altar, a miniature red temple containing a framed picture of a Chinese God" (13). In front of this altar which appeared to Pearl like a Christmas crèche, Auntie Du kept incense sticks burning in an imitation brass urn and "in the side were offerings of oranges, Lucky Strike cigarettes" (14).

The grand funeral given to Auntie Du, by friends and relatives is attended by Weili and her daughter Pearl her husband and children. Buddhist monks, head-shaven, saffron-robed, chant "Amitabha Amitabha" accompanied by the loud wailing of professional mourners who are Vietnamese women. At the end of the service everyone bowed to the body lying in an open casket, before which is kept a low table overflowing with rich Chinese food. At this juncture Pearl examines her own faith/faithlessness in these rituals and experiences guilt, the same guilt she felt- "when [her] father baptized [her] and she did not believe [she] was saved forever, when [she] took communion and did not believe the grape juice was the blood of Christ. . . ." (47).

Kwan's belief in the spirit of dead people "World of Yin" communicating to the living in The Hundred Secret Senses can be traced to Taoist belief in immortality of the soul. Kwan's belief in
rebirth is so strong that the novel traces two of her previous births one as Pancake, the thin girl "a flimsy piece of fritter" (223) and the other as Nunumu, the servant girl to God worshippers. According to Kwan's story her friend, the plump girl of five' named Buncake was "not of this world" (224). Some said she was possessed by the spirit of "a dead Japanese pilot [who] fell from the sky and lodged in her body" (224). One day during a particularly dry season where no rain came to their village, drought was evident everywhere, the two little good friends were sitting at the side of a dusty ditch that ran alongside their house. Suddenly lightning and thunder started, bringing the rain that kept "gurgling" the river flooded and it carried away the children "faster and faster 'until the water spat [them]out into a field' " (227). The girls were taken as dead and put into coffins. Their mothers Big Ma and Du Yun were waiting for the rain to stop to conduct the funeral. On the third day when the sun rose, the coffin was opened by the loving mothers for a last look of their dear daughters. To their surprise they saw one of the children alive. A visit to a famous "ghost- talker" confirmed the story: "the girl who lived in this body before doesn't want to come back. And the girl who lives in it now can't leave until she finds her" (230). From that day onwards Pancake's spirit lived in the body of Buncake. At the funeral of Buncake was considered a ghost and a wonder to the villagers. In this way the skinny Pancake was reborn in the body of
Buncake. The life of Pancake as Buncake is reborn as Nunumu a Hakka girl in Thistle mountain, Chagmian. Nunumu is killed by Manchu soldiers on the night of the 1864, defeat of Heavenly Kingdom. Nunumu gets reborn as Kwan who was the daughter of Jack Lee, Olivia's father before he left for America.

Though sprits and yin people pervade the atmosphere of The Hundred Secret Senses, it has already been dealt with, although in a lesser degree by Tan in her two earlier novels. The Chinese culture, which is known for its belief in fairies, ghosts, spirits and superstitions, is well represented in Tan's fiction. For instance Ying-Ying in Joy Luck Club believes in arranging the furniture in the house in such a way that a "balance" is maintained, for, she would whisper to Lena her daughter, "when something goes against nature you are not in balance" (108). Ying-Ying was dissatisfied and disturbed if the house was built on a steep hill, for "a bad wind from the top blows all [your] strength back down the hill." As a result one would "never get ahead," "always rolling backwards" (109).

This belief in sprits and superstitions paradoxically coexists with Christian beliefs in the ethos of the Chinese Americans. This is revealed in the reactions manifested by An-mei Hsu when she loses a son, Bing on the beach. An-mei had found an explanation for this tragedy. One of their dead ancestors who had stolen water
from a sacred well was being avenged by the coiling Dragon who lived in the sea. The Dragon had captured Bing, and now they must loosen him from its coils by “giving him another treasure he can hide” (Joy Luck Club 128). So An-mei poured sweetened tea into a cup and threw the cup with the tea into the sea. Then she threw a beautiful blue sapphire ring that had been a gift from her mother, into the sea. She believed that the beautiful ring would make the Coiling Dragon forgetful of Bing. In this way Bing would return. Of course such a thing never happens, and for this An-mei finds another superstitious explanation.

Through such descriptions of cultural details Tan effectively mediates her ethnic culture, shorn of its racist stereotyping of the “exotic Oriental” or “shabby east,” to a non-ethnic audience. With the authority of an insider she traverses through territories as diverse as food, architecture and socio cultural rituals. The Chinese Lunar New Year that falls in January end is the most important festival in China and repeatedly mentioned as occasions for celebrations in Tan’s novels. In The Joy Luck Club June recollects the new year celebration held in the previous year of her mother’s death; when they had hosted a Chinese New Year Banquet for the Joy Luck Club aunties and their families.

Henry Tsai states that seasons celebration become important social events for the Chinese living in America. (The Chinese
American Experience 36). Weili informs Pearl about the preparations that began few days before the new year. Thorough cleaning of the house would be undertaken, debts would be repaid, “not a single bad word could fall from anyone’s mouth for three days” (Kitchen God’s Wife 135). Clothes had to be mended so that they did not show any “unlucky signs of prosperity coming apart” (137). The actual feasting lasted for three days after the New Year.

Food is an important aspect of Chinese life and Tan has made abundant references to the ethnic cuisine known for its taste as well as medicinal properties. This is dealt with more in detail in the sixth chapter of this dissertation.

The ethnic backdrop against which Tan and Mukherjee locate their narratives is a typical feature of immigrant writing. According to Guy Amrithanayagam, culture should not be seen as a setting or an aura surrounding the literary work. Sometimes it becomes as much an integral element as the thought, the characters, the actions or the language. Tan’s fiction bear evidence of this statement. All her works written about Chinese immigrants-old and new, reveal the Chinese consciousness, their ethnic ethos, manifested through their living patterns – food, eating, rituals, etc. Jules Chamtezky in his pioneering work Decentralised Literature believes that consciousness and its products are integral and constitutive elements of “reality” not mere reflections of some other
more basic, primary reality. They are the essential means by which human beings live, by which they know and shape what their experience is all about (58). Human culture is the creations of forms and modes – of behaviour, ritualisation, and representations, which enable people to grasp, give meaning to, and get through their lives. "Immigration literatures help to familiarise the strange artefacts of life encountered in the immigrant experience" (60). Thus this literature can function as mediator and creator of culture. As tools of mediations, Tan and Mukherjee familiarise the readers on their ethnic culture. Tan's novels abound in Chinese culture- culinary, marriage rituals, wifely duties, filial duties and obligations, Confucian philosophy, Chinese beliefs, superstitions, Chinese décor, architecture, jewellery etc. Mukherjee also employs myths, images, legends from Hindu mythology such as the Rama–Sita–Ravana legend, Bengali Hindu deities like goddess Kali, Durga, other Hindu gods–Ganpati, Lord Hanuman, Vishnu, Vedanta philosophy and the typical Bengali lifestyle and marriage preparations (Wife) with which the novelist might have been most familiar with.

Novels are according to Said in a way pictures of reality whether of the empire or that of colonialism. In the case of ethnic literature one gets a hybrid world view of immigrant who carries within him / her the past and the present. The historicization of the
old country and its traditions, crosses over to the reality of the immigrant's present existence in the new country. The product is a hybrid culture containing elements of the dominant culture as well as the peripheral minority culture. These ethnic novels derive its force from the historicization of the past as well as the narrativisation of society.
NOTES

1 Refers to the tradition of oral history prevalent among Asian American. In the short story, 'The World of Our Grandmothers' Connie Young Yu refers to this method of transmitting / preserving history and culture down the ages. In this way “children learnt their own oral history through a family chain of generations”. Making Waves ed. Asian women United Ltd. of California, (Boston: 1989), p33.

2 Nicholas Cage's Eleni is a book written primarily around Eleni's life as married woman, whose husband has immigrated to the United States. The story dramatises the hardships of Eleni during World War II, and the Civil War that followed the withdrawal of the German occupation army, which begins in the pre-industrial society of the mountain village of Lia in northern Greece. Eleni is eventually tried and condemned to death by a revolutionary court. Later her son Nicholas who has fled to the U.S. along with three of his sisters, becomes an investigative reporter for the New York Times and takes revenge upon his mother's executioners.

3 A Chinese word that has no equivalent in English language. Weili uses it in The Kitchen God's Wife. In her words it means "terrible danger is coming not just to you but to many people ... it is a fear that chases you..." (260).
4The term Tai P'ing is made of two Chinese words. Tai' meaning Peace and P'ing meaning King. It was a group formed in 1847 by Hung Hsiu a Chinese scholar who converted to Christianity during a severe illness. Historical facts show that the Heavenly King (Tai P'ing) was defeated in 1864 by a combined attack mounted by Manchu revolutionaries aided by British Traders.