CHAPTER V

WORLD AND TOWN – “THE UNLIVED LIFE ISN’T WORTH LIVING”

Gish Jen portrays different kinds of people in different generations in her novels. All their transformation towards the dominant culture is not the same. Some people acquire it by themselves and others learn it from their parents, who handled the issues and showed them how they faced the consequences. *World and Town* is enriched with the ideas of the ways in which people adapt or fail to, and how their lives are made. This novel also shows the bonding between what the people trust in and whether their beliefs debilitating them or help them to progress in their life. Gish Jen explores the immigrant experience, not only as a pragmatic and sentimental issue faced by many Americans, but also as a symbol for the sense of apartness which is a part of human consciousness. This chapter also deals with how Hattie differs in the opinion of the other people of River lake town and volunteers her to blend with every human being.

**Summary of the Novel**

The novel opens with a prologue where Hattie Kong, an eight year old girl, narrates her childhood memories in the Chinese town of Qufu, Shandong province. She appreciates the spiritual aspects of the graveyard which she gets to know from her missionary mother. Hattie’s father is Chinese and mother is an English missionary. Hattie’s grandmother brings her an alliance which would require Hattie to marry at the age of fifteen, in spite of her mixed blood. Hattie’s mother rejects it saying that it must be a choice of hers. Hattie’s father had become westernized in his clothes, food and lifestyle, but after two months he stopped following it. The Red guards took over the graveyard and stole even the dirt in the mound. Hattie envisions the graveyard as a “world with membership, it seemed, and eternal
order”(W&T). Owing to the imminent Japanese invasion, her parents send her to Iowa where she becomes a research biologist.

After that Jen portrays her as 68 year old retiree. After the death of her husband Joe and her friend Lee, she lives alone with her dogs in a New England town. Her house is situated in River lake-a town born of change. Her son who works abroad for a radio, talks to her rarely, which happens like an “event”. Her only companions are her dogs and the people in the walking group. The arrival of the Chhungs, a Cambodian family, brings her hope of a new companionship. She wants to befriend them by often visiting their trailer for offering cookies, biscuits and invites the ladies in their family for Tea and Snack. But the Chuung family survives on what Mum earns by cleaning and what Sarun brings in from his criminal adventures. Hattie likes Sophy in that family and she introduces her to her walking group members. After Ginny, one of the walking group members introduces Sophy, to a fundamentalist church, Sophy turns away from Hattie and Sophy’s family blames Hattie for a change.

Hattie’s former lover, Carter visits her and the love, though they do not express it much till the end of the novel. She rewinds her memories of working in Carter’s lab, and as a teacher in a high school. She always brings in the memories of her husband Joe and her witty friend Lee by revisiting their ideas or suggestions they had given her. She recreates herself by her paintings of bamboo, thinking about the dogs and watching the lake outside her window. She often receives requests from her Chinese relatives to bring her parents’ bones and ashes to China to cremate them with their ancestors. Initially, she refuses because her parents had not said anything about their burial but finally she couriers it to them. She felt that it pulled her into ancestral worship that had traditionally been of her culture. When her son Josh finds a girl, Serena for marriage, Hattie feels happy and but later Serena rejects him reasoning he is too old for her.
Half- half American

In a traditional Chinese family, women are expected to be perfect daughters, wives and always putting others before themselves. Hattie Kong was not fully Chinese but she had learnt the Chinese traits from her father’s family. She is a second generation immigrant but we can see the mix of cultures, Chinese and American, in her way of handling things. Geertz agrees to the fact, “culture is between the minds of these individuals not in them” (Theories of Culture, 84). Good enough, a cultural theorist, places “culture in the minds and hearts of men…what form cultures take depend on what individual humans can think, imagine and learn….”(Theories of Culture, 85). Hattie in her childhood grew up in the Shangdong province. It is a place which teaches her the Chinese cultural practices and values. Since her father was a Chinese they are happened to live with their father’s family. Her mother was a lady from missionary often addressed as a “Chinaman’s wife”. They live in Quingdao as her father runs his business there. Hattie is a half Chinese and half American and so in her actions and her behavior people can see the mix of both the cultures even at the age of 68. A person who is having both the cultures as a background will have a sense of feeling between the worlds. In Chinese she sees more of superstitious practices which are followed blindly as a traditional cultural practice. But being an American she has the freedom of choosing her life. And it is not sentimental. Though a missionary her mother insists Hattie to do the sweeping work at their ancestors’ graveyard. She says, “…modern people that they were- her mother and father were far more interested in Hu Shih and Darwin than in the Old Sage” (W&T,5). They learnt the Chinese culture and tradition in a logical way than in a ritualistic way. Hattie finds it as a “hogwash”. For Hattie to find a place in the cemetery after the death is like a membership in the family. Since Hattie is a mixed blood. They want her to get married to a Chinese at the age of fifteen. Kong’s cousins are willing to marry Hattie in spite of her mixed identity. Throughout the novel she worries about the death of her husband Joe and friend Lee,
she could not sweep away from their memories. She suffers from loneliness which is beyond words. She has sprinkled Joe’s ashes in the garden and thinks where she will be buried after her death. She comforts herself by saying that she might be buried along with her dogs, like Lee was buried in the peony bed. Meanwhile her new Cambodian neighbours start developing a friendship with Hattie. They wonder how Hattie is able to speak two languages-Chinese and English. Hattie explains her experience as an in-house immigrant where she used to help people in acquiring the English accent.

Hattie voluntarily visits the Chhungs with a reason to return their drawer and welcomes them with her cookies. In the meantime she gives a glance to their house which seemed to have the signs of poverty reminded her of a Chinese saying, “The sorrows of the rich are not real sorrows; the comforts of the poor are not real comforts” (W&T, 25). When Hattie reminds of her golden days with her friend Lee, husband Joe, and the sufferings she has gone through in Vietnam, she will start painting. “The values embodied in traditional Chinese painting are those of the Confucian scholar or Taoist recluse-searching for truth in nature. Nature is seen by the Chinese as a partner in a harmonious productive relationship with humankind” (Increasing Multicultural Understanding, 83). She is not artistic but she does that just to deviate her mind. She has created a group with the people of River lake. They used to go for a walk as an exercise. But during their walking they talk about each other just like gossiping. Hattie hates gossiping and also she is very clear that she should not be their subject one day. The return of Carter, Hattie’s ex-boyfriend is shocking for the people around her. They even suggested Hattie to marry Carter since she feels alone, for which Hattie turned a deaf ear to. Hattie is good observer of people and finds a solution for their problems. She never hurts anybody by her words or actions. Carter has a hesitation whether Hattie will talk to him because it is Carter who ignores marrying her. But Hattie tries to behave casually with
Carter. She even accepts Carter’s advice, “Think out of the box. It’s the way every great thing gets made” (W&T,38).

At one point of her life she wants to get rid of all her worries and wants her life to be beneficial for the world. She involves herself in the issue regarding the launch of cell-tower in River lake. When the town got the DSL, the cell-phone tower company wants to have a place to build their tower. Neddy Needham, a lawyer for the River lake, protests against the coming up of the cell-phone tower considering the radiation point of view. Giving proper facts, Neddy proves that River lake is not the site for a cell-phone tower. But still the company is not ready to accept the facts and the case moves on. Hattie got inspired by Neddy thought she has to do something for her society. Already the Walking group in which she is member, has started taking initiatives to make people use eco-friendly products like green handkerchiefs etc. They insist the people to practice yoga. Hattie Kong started creating a great affinity with Riverlake. This makes Hattie to be so receptive with her new Cambodian neighbors. Ratanak Chhung is the head of the family. Sophy and Sarun support the family financially but not very happy with their life. The little Gift is taken care of by Mum. She also earns by working as maid in the houses but she has to leave her job because of her ill health. The poor financial condition of the family makes Sarun to indulge in criminal activities with a gang. Hattie is able to understand Sarun since she has Josh of his age. Both Sophie and Sarun take the advice of Hattie Kong in whatever they do. The Cambodian family cannot maintain their cultural practices since Sophy and Sarun have other ideas. Hattie shows them the way which they expect in their life. Hattie is American in giving importance to an individual’s feelings and opinions. If she is strict Chinese, she cannot have these many friends who belong to other ethnic community. Hattie is Chinese when she involves herself in the protest against the built of the cell-phone tower. She does her part to save her Riverlake. “Riverlake- a town born of a river…~a town born of change” (W&T,14). When Neddy points
out “whose town is this?” during his argument, she feels to say “its ours”. Despite of many
wars and revolutions, the Chinese were able to retain their love for China, though they
immigrate to the Other land. The phrase “half-half American” fits Hattie, not only of her
mixed blood but also of her thoughts and actions. She differs only in some superstitious
beliefs which still exist in her Chinese ancestry. She differs from the Americans when she
involves herself in the protests against her Riverlake. In this phase, she uses Confucius’
collectivistic learning to perceive the society as a whole not being individualistic. She even
thinks it as her duty to be a part of this kind of social activism.

The Chinese “hogwash”

Jen has portrayed Hattie as old in her age and young in her spirit. The burial after her
death is always a question within her. She has a high respect for her parents who teache her
how the world is. In Riverlake, she keeps worrying for being alone, but her Chinese relatives
often send her e-mails addressing her as Aunt Hattie. They share their family issues and ask
for an opinion. This is a practice of the Chinese to get the advice of the elderly person of the
family. But Hattie has never thought of them as her relatives, and she always addresses as her
father’s Chinese relatives. She does not want to have fake relationship which is not worthy
of. They discuss on Vivian, a Chinese girl who works in bar lost her job because of her co-
employees. They ask Hattie to find a driver job for their relative. But these things are of no
concern for Hattie. “Never mind that she’s only head of the family because her younger
brothers have both died; never mind that her relatives have no real reason to listen to anyone
at all, really. (W&T, 41). To Hattie, everyone should undergo what they have to and what has
to do next, is their idea of overcoming it. Hattie’s ideology is that suggestions can be given
by others but the final decision should be of that individual and the family members have no
role to play in it except giving a moral support. “For thousands of years, the Chinese have
been obsessed with the blinks between generations-past, present and future. Ancestor worship
is a major part of Chinese culture, stimulating art and ritual. Reverence for the past is
demonstrated in the enormous energies devoted to tombs, rituals and burial customs”
(Increasing Multicultural Understanding, 83). Hattie could not bear the truth how could
people in China are so superstitious though there are “M.A.’s and M.B.A.’s and Ph.D.’s from
the States” (W&T, 41). Hattie imagines, “Of course, the Chinese have always sent bones
home, having been brought up from birth to recite…Fallen leaves return to their roots. But to
want to do it now! In the twenty-first century!…”(W&T, 41). They understand Hattie is not
interested in performing the ritual for her ancestors. They want her to do the ritual because it
may affect their family. Tina, Hattie’s Chinese niece tries to convince Hattie by saying,”Only
we can guess that the graves of Grandpa and Grandma are not auspicious. The story we
always hear is how Grandpa and Grandma were not buried in Qufu” (W&T, 43). They insist
Hattie in their email,” Grandpa and Grandma should be moved to Qufu, which is their real
home? We believe they are lonely in Iowa. …Of course we understand there is some question
whether Grandma can stay in the graveyard in Qufu too” (W&T, 44). Hattie cannot accept
this statement because she believes a family is complete with a man, his wife, and children.
She questions herself that how a wife can be neglected from a family because she does not
belong to their community. In every Chinese home, the wives hold the moral responsibility of
the family next to the male head. She writes, “I am coming to wonder how a heaven that
would not have your mother could be heaven” (W&T,390). The rejection of her mother from
her father’s burial ground aggravates the anger of Hattie. But Tina does not mean the
rejection of Hattie’s mother but just points out that she does not belong to the real Chinese.
Still they want to worship her as their ancestor. “The group shared a common ancestor
associated with a locality. The males were the members of the lineage, and the females joined
their husband’s lineage through marriage” (Increasing Multicultural Understanding, 85).
Either they sent emails about the Qufu graveyard or they ask for money. When the Chinese
relatives ask for her parents’ bones and ashes to do the ancestral worship saying “Fallen leaves return to their roots”, she wonders how her parents had this hold in their homeland which Hattie hadn’t. Instead of ‘how’, the question ‘why’ is her matter of interest. For which she does not get the answer. Hattie discusses the graveyard issue with her walking group friends Greta and Grace. “We’re so much less connected to the earth than we were” (W&T, 384). A statement which changes Hattie’s mind to consider the request of the Chinese relatives. When she visits her ancestral house she found Uncle Samuel is using that house. “… Only the youngest of the uncles is still bravely holding out in Grandpa Amos’s house-Uncle Samuel. Living alone though he is in his nineties now.” (W&T, 391). The Chinese living stresses and appreciates to be strong to live alone. There are many Chinese in the Mainland China run their life alone for years since they have sent their children abroad or because of the political instability prevailed in China for a time being. It is their filial duty to take care of the age old people in their family. In those situations, Hattie should be appreciated because she not only takes care of her but also she loves her dogs and brings them up as a part of her family. This is proved when her son asked for a room on his visit to his home, he enquires that whether he has a room or it is fully occupied by the dogs. In this novel an individual’s stubbornness and their strong will is to be valued and not the Chinese rituals. They may even think they are strong willed because of the rituals they perform as a cultural practice. She believes that if her parents are alive they prefer to sprinkle their ashes in the garden instead burying them in Qufu. They believe that as a ‘worth living’. Tony Hom, a twenty-five years old Chinese American shares his experience in a ritual.

When I was growing up they seemed to worship a dead relative on certain holidays Prior to Chinese New Year for instance, they would burn this paper… There were always setting for three people, but I never has any idea who they were for… Three is a lucky number… The table was laid out to symbolically invite the spirits to eat. So
that shattered that lifelong thought (chuckles). (Asian American experiences in the US, 167).

Hattie wants to hand over the bones in person to her Chinese Relatives. Hattie refers to her Nainai saying that “The oldest male in the family should do it. ….I am the only member left of my generation”. For Hattie the urns which carry the bones are just another baggage to carry and she gives it for checking also. Tina answers, “Johnson know a monk can do special prayer, ask the spirit to come along with the remains…” (W&T, 458).

After Hattie agrees to send the bones, she writes back Tina, “…Do you really believe this? Because I am modern, like my parents. Of a scientific disposition, as you know” (W&T, 385). For a real Chinese like Tina, it is a Chinese cultural practice that brings blessing from ancestors. She adds it may sound “like crazy superstition….Chinese culture is last 5,000 years, some part must be something right” (W&T, 386). Hattie understands it logically stating it as “…we humans are prone to superstition. We’re wired to seek cause and effect whether it’s there or not- to make ‘sense’ of things even if the result is nonsense.”(W&T, 386).Hattie believes it as a tradition which the Chinese people follow with hope and humility without knowing the logic behind it. Hattie plans to visit the bone picker. She visits Lenine who is an expert in bone picking and sending the ashes to the Mainlanders. He describes all the procedures to be followed. Hattie asks them to write ‘Mama Baba’. Lenine clearly marks that in the urn. It was a touching moment for Hattie, she remembers her parents have not seen Lee and Joe in their life time. She has seen her parents as young and rebellious. She feels she is not with her parents during their death. Hattie successfully got the urns of her parents. Everybody appreciated her act of bringing back the bones of her parents. “It’s a beautiful thing you are doing” says Grace. “A compassionate thing” says Greta (W&T,402). After several days she has got emails from Tina regarding sending the bones to the graveyard. Hattie replies, “How can I just send them. The bones or ashes…The oldest male in the family
must do it. Though where these are modern times and I am the only member left of my generation, maybe she would forgive me for doing it instead…” (W&T, 458). Whatever Hattie says, the Chinese relatives will not argue since she is considered as the head of the family. Hattie sends the bones to her and she does not want to accompany that. After that she received email that her parents got their place in the graveyard. As mentioned earlier, to Hattie finding a place in the cemetery is like holding a membership in the family. She successfully found a place for her parents after so many years. As the Chinese proverb says, ‘Fallen leaves return to their roots’. She convinces herself, “I think they would’ve loved being a help to the living. The whole idea that their bones could bring comfort to anyone, half a century later-they would’ve loved that” (W&T, 459). She considers that as humanity instead of immortality. Hattie has no feeling of whether she will find a place in the graveyard. She believes in ‘worth living’ - to be beneficial for the society. She acts the same in Riverlake. She imagines a world in her town which contains the Cambodian neighbors, walking group friends, her dead Lee and Joe. It is not that she tries to create world but her efforts focus only the society’s development.

Though she follows the practices of Confucius which insists on the human relationship, she does not do it blindly. The preaching of Confucius however is ingrained in her automatically through her Chinese father’s influence. Hattie never agrees but at last sends the bones believing that even her parents might love her for doing this. She says that she feels that having their bones at her home brings her connection to the past and “Putting me, no doubt, on a road to ancestor worship” (W&T, 460). Hattie finds her connect with the earth only in Riverlake not in her family forest cemetery of Qufu.
Understanding the ‘Worth Living’

Hattie is very modern in her thoughts and she does not believe in Tina’s way of worship with the help of a Chinese monk who makes the spirits accompany their remains of the dead. She does not believe in feudal superstitions which is an American perspective. Her rational thinking helps understand people even better instead of finding fault like the other people in her walking group. She considers that keeping the parents happy lies in the manner in which we let them live in the way they want to. Her understanding of life is applicable not only for her parents but also to everyone in the world regardless of their culture, religion or any ethnic group- this is also an American influence. Hattie understands religion as a culture of people not as divider of human beings. Her attempt to know her neighbors, a Cambodian family substantiates this. She understands their children Sophy and Sarun are better than their parents. She encourages Sophy to get an education instead of spending their time with the baby, Gift. She notices Sarun’s nefarious relationships with a gang that sells drugs and wants to show him a better future. She does not believe in the way the Chhungs handle the situation by beating him with a belt which is later replaced with a knife.

Hattie intends to show Sophy and Sarun a better life. These Cambodian children understand it by listening to her suggestions and seek her for guidance in their efforts, instead of getting it from their parents. Hattie agrees to Josh’s selection of Serena. In the case of the traditional Chinese, they prefer only arranged marriages. Children’s choice of spouse in a marriage is not encouraged. When Josh tells her of his desire, the first thing she thought of is the age difference between them. She does not mind that her son does not ask her for any opinion. She even thinks that their child would be a multicultural baby. She considers Josh, Sophy and Sarun equally. Instead of holding up the conservative values of any ethnicity, she decides to let them explore what a choice in their life can change. Like an often quoted Chinese Proverb by her father, “Bamboos bend but not break.” She applies the same
technique with these modern children. Maybe if Josh had babies she would have to evolve some other strategy to make them understand the importance of people. It is not a trick to get them towards your side, but it is just the way Hattie is. She sees the future “world from a different window” (W&T,466).

In this novel, Hattie is not found to be as a typical Chinese woman holding on to the practices and customs of Chinese. She reasons out everything before being judgmental. One can say that she is influenced by Chinese Confucianism and by some glimpses of Chinese lifestyle like bamboo paintings, making authentic Chinese dishes etc. Her deviation from Chinese tradition is not one that happened for the sake of survival. It is fabricated by her parents’ approach to their life. She imbibes the spirit of ‘Chinese’ from her father and ‘American’ from her mother. In this novel, the departure from culture helps her get socially with the people around her instead of following a custom blindly. Yet she is respected by her Chinese relatives as the head of the family. She gathers some traits from the Chinese and successfully applies in her life without knowing it as a ‘Chinese’. Hattie stands as an obvious example of Good enough’s statement “culture must be thinkable and learnable as well as livable” (Theories of Culture, 86).

Gish Jen introduces characters of different levels in this novel. Each one has their own purpose of changing the culture or deviating from the culture. This change is unavoidable for any immigrant. Her filial duty as a Chinese daughter has not swept away her rational thinking. She tries to provide the next generation what she has learnt from her parents with logic. Though these convictions are not listened by the next generation in China, Hattie is able to convince with the same thoughts to the generation in the United States. What she found from the people of China is they are not ready to accept a fact which is against their culture or tradition. Though she is alone, she has not compelled her son to stay with her like the typical Chinese mothers do. She expects him to be with her but does not reveal it to her
son. She understands the practical impossibility of her son staying with her. She will not let her convictions out unless she is satisfied with that first. Also she is not of the ‘following the flow’. When there is any discussion on Come ‘N’ Eat, the walking group members sort out the things what they heard on that day. Hattie wants her own space in which there will not be any trespassers over it. Her attitude towards each and every character is not the same. She cannot handle the Chhungs with the same approach. The Mum blames her as Hattie keeps Sophy and Sarun away from their traditional practices. Her words, “the ancient Cambodian women are stronger than their men” (W&T,320) in the olden days are not accepted even by her children. As the bread winners of the family they are able to see who is stronger and who is not. For those Cambodian children it is just satisfying words from a mother. She tries to patches up the relation between the children and their strict father. Hattie does that in a way which is liked by the new generation.

Judy-Tell-All is very informative to Hattie. She brings some news about their walking group members. Though Hattie never asked for it, she reveals everything, she also never advices any of her friends. Whatever the problem maybe, they just come and share in Hattie’s home. She is not strict even with her dogs. The world, in which Hattie lives, is totally different from the world of other characters. She tries to maintain a neutral behavior with her walking group friends. She believes only this kind of behavior will make a relationship long lasting. She remains as an American individual when it comes to people’s individual concern. And, she behaves as Chinese when she takes the society as a whole.

Gish Jen’s insight for each and every character of her novel is remarkable. She brings in Yin and Yang theory to show the balance of the husband and wife in running a family life.

Yin and Yang are polar terms that describe the contrasting yet complementary elements of the universe. A yin-yang imbalance results in dysfunction. Yin represents
the female, negative energy-passive, unassertive, inhibited, vague, internal and concrete human factors. Yin stores the vital strength of life. Winter and spring illnesses are Yin. Yang represents male positive energy-active, excited, aggressive, external, bright and abstract human factors. Yang protects the body from outside forces. Summer and fall illnesses are yang. (Increasing Multicultural Understanding, 91).

Life has the two sides: positive and negative. If people worry about their problems for a long time, it will make their life passive and concrete. Instead if they take steps to overcome all the obstacles, that will strengthen their hope of living and also it energizes them. Jen brings in this hope through Hattie. When she thinks about her dead husband Joe and friend Lee, she feels sick. At the same time if she helps the Cambodian neighbors or while discussing on the Riverlake issue, she feels energized.

This story is more of an American than of a Chinese. Hattie is shown as an American but her social activities show her as a Chinese. Her questioning capacity of the Chinese rituals and practices associate her with the second generation immigrant qualities. In prologue, when her mother asked to sweep the graveyard, she did it as it was said by her mother. Her mother gives a hope to Hattie that whatever she says has a logical thinking behind it. But what can be logical when somebody asks to sweep the graveyard, she understands that situation as not a blind practice but as a sharing of work. Chinese share their works with their family. They even involve their children in their business to make them understand the survival instincts. As a traditional Chinese, she adheres to what she has learnt from her parents. But the difference arises how her parents taught them to her. The American in her always risen up when she finds it is difficult to accept something by heart. Sometimes she imagines the reasons which are apt to the situations.
Sophy’s prayers, “Change my heart O God; make it ever true—Change my heart O God; may it be like you” (W&T, 190). This prayer is applicable for Hattie also. She does not want to change her mind deliberately from the reality and she prays to give the strength to accept the reality.

**World within the Town**

As Riverlake is born out of a lake, Hattie also creates a world within her town. She never associates herself with her Chinese ancestry but she uses it just for an identity as Chinese American. Also when she introduces herself as a Chinese American, she insists that she was living in the town long before, to show her disconnect with her Chinese ancestry. She understands the people in the town: her neighbors, walking group members and the dogs are her world in the town. She always finds a way for the beneficial of others instead of blaming others or putting others down in their feelings. As a second generation immigrant, she neglects her Chinese values blaming it as a “crazy superstition”. But she does the works related to her parents’ reburial in the family forest of Qufu, uses Chinese brushes to draw her paintings, Chinese foods, the way she gathers everyone in her town: all these shows the Chinese in her. She is made to practice the Chinese values in some way or other. If she thinks it as a coincidence or humanity, that is the Chinese in her.

Creating a world around her does not mean that she keeps herself away from the real world. She incites whatever she sees in the outer world and her world is full of her observance. It is not the same as living between the worlds. The real world portrays the reality of human life and the world she has created has all the logical observances by her for every action. The passing of the cell tower issue aggravates her anger, “How could anyone do this? demands Hattie. “With all of Town so against it? Who?” (W&T, 219). She could not accept the fact the company has their permit approved. Since it’s a small town they can easily
find out who is behind in approving their permit. She feels, “…this is Riverlake, after all. A
good town, a town that prides itself on having everyone in its picture (W&T, 220). Hattie can
be compared with Riverlake as she considers everyone in her world. “Now, every day. She
knew: Her father was Chinese. She was raised in China. And yet she was not her old self,
translated. Neither was she a Chinese in America. She was just foreign…a stranger”
(W&T, 231). When some of her Chinese relatives email about the death of her son, Hattie
thinks for a while whether this really happened because of the graves. But anyway she wants
to reply as “For all of the horror of this, I just do not believe that moving my parents’ graves
will make a difference, but does not” (W&T, 239). Since Hattie was a student of biology, she
knows the science behind every human’s burial after death. That might also be a reason for
her non-acceptance of her Chinese rituals. She always questions herself in her world
logically, whatever she comes across. What is the obstacle that stops her accepting the
Chinese values and practices? She neither likes nor dislikes her Chinese ancestry but she has
a hatred towards the superstition behind every ritual practices. She finds those as obsolete and
not modern. The whole novel revolves around Hattie. We come to know about the characters
in this novel through the insight of Hattie. She sometimes feels to Carter, “something’s are not
given to us’’(W&T,246). There is always a pause after Hattie’s sad statements which made
the readers to participate in her sad moments.

“…there were whole years where she more or less lived for those moments of saying
nothing. Even after she married Joe and had Josh, she still heard them-as Joe knew, of
course. She had no secrets from Joe….Are you going to look up Carter Hatch when
I’m dead? Never mind that she hadn’t seen Carter for decades….The sicker Joe got,
the angrier he got-not unlike a child separating from his parents, Hattie
thought….Give me your kindness to remember , not this.(W&T,247).
Throughout the novel Hattie has never had the instinct to be recognized as an American. It is because she is living in a town which accommodates many immigrants from other countries like Korea, Japan, Vietnam etc. Prior to that her loneliness makes her sick, even then she does not want to go back to her roots. The Chinese relative never gives her hope to take care of her though she is the eldest person in the family, yet Hattien ever claims her deserving. Living as a pluralistic society stops her from going back to the roots. This attitude prevails in the American society which lives as heterogeneous group. The immigrants living in this heterogeneous society gather and form a different society. They celebrate the American festivals and also the festivals related to their own ethnic community. This is also a world within the town. By living as pluralistic society how people embrace with each other is the essence of this kind of society. The common ideals shared by this kind of group is: they never mind about the people’s ethnicity as minority, they tend to understand the culture, practices of other ethnicities, People used to be broadminded considering the traditional values as outdated, also look for the well being of others irrespective of their ethnic group. Their world confined to the people they know in the society. There is always a welcoming entry for this kind of society and people never want to go back to their native or the dominant. There is no dominant culture in this kind of society since everybody accepts and adjusts with each other. The Cambodian neighbors initially hesitate to mingle with people inspite of their poverty. But it is Hattie who clears the way for them to understand the world outside. They are confined to their trailer in the beginning. Hattie successfully brings them out and shows them the world is wide open with full of opportunities for people to prosper. She also convinces the Mum and Chhung, who tend to be traditional in holding their native values. Though initially they blame her after seeing the remarkable changes in Sophy and Sarun, later they understand. Sophy and Sarun rely more on Hattie than on their parents. The society needs such changes in the outlook of the people. Instead of being stereotyped, this
kind of society helps them overcome their stereotypes. But whether it will make them to
neglect their native culture still remains as a question. Hattie admires Sophy for her elegance
and beauty. During a conversation with her she understands that she wants to change her
religion and Hattie finds a way for it through Ginny. Sophy has changed with the help of
Ginny but started neglecting Hattie. Hattie never bothers that. She is even happy that Sophy
has got what she desired for. In the case of Sarun, everybody looks at him as a violent guy
but for Hattie he reminds of her son Josh. Hattie understands others feelings by putting
herself in the shoes of them. She always empathises with people. She handles Sarun with care
because she knows that violent approach of his father will not work out. They are the reasons
for the change that crops in Hattie. At last it is Sarun who comforts her heart. A bonding has
been created between Hattie and Sarun, which she thinks is equal to that of she has with Josh.
When Hattie is able to convince Sarun, she hopes that she can comfort Josh also. Josh is
affected by Serena’s reply that he is too young to marry her. Initially this was said by Hattie
to Josh when he informed about her dating with Serena. She said the same as Serena, not as a
warning but as a ground reality. Hattie is able to predict what the next generation will think
of.

The immigrants who live as a heterogeneous community have to undergo this change.
It is not a rejection of their native culture but acceptance of the other cultures. It creates a
healthy environment for the immigrant people who live in the Other land. This kind of
changes benefit them socially because it is wide open for people who want to be gathered as a
group and each of them accept people as they are. Being American never bothers them as an
issue to be worried about. The question arises whether they continue their emotional touch
with their native culture. Living as a heterogeneous group benefits them psychologically to
overcome their feeling of loneliness. Personally they tend to feel complete with their people
around them. Hattie substitutes Sarun for her son, Josh. It does not mean that Josh is of less importance for her. She treats them equally.

*World and Town* shows Jen’s authoritative “tales about the search of a true home in multiethnic America…begins in an entirely different mood. Grief is all over, with jittery undertone of suspicion; and the novel’s humor, while plentiful…” (*The New York Times*, Nov, 2010). It is also about how Hattie balances her Confucian ideology with her kind-heartedness. The ‘immortality’ is replaced by ‘humanity’. Hattie attempts to bridge the gap between her and the Cambodian family. But since they share the same kind of immigrant experience as Chinese, they find comfort in each other. So it has been an attempt in the side of Hattie to move them from their sad past. She totally gives them a different window to view the world. And at last she looks at them in a different window. Jen’s craftsmanship in scripting her characters to portray the reality exists in the society is clear in this novel. The novel can be said as an attempt to display the existing problems prevalent in the society. As usual Jen never gives a solution for these problems. She makes the readers understand that problems have their own healing power and it is in the hands of the human being to comprehend or complicate it. As Joe, Hattie’s husband points out, the novel pictures “the world that has come to town”. The ‘world’ represents the people of different ethnicity and the ‘town’ represents the heterogeneous society.

“One of Jen’s greatest strengths is her fluid point of view, which she employs beautifully here…nothing is fixed for these unsettled characters, who keep trying to build new lives in a bewildering world, and whose victories, when they come, bring not rapture but ‘a defining grace, bittersweet and hard-won’” (*The New York Times*, Nov, 2010). Gish Jen follows a tactics of making the readers realize the focus is not on the Americans of US but it is on the multi-ethnic people in US. There is no sense of oppression or suppression in this novel. The depression is because of their mental illness which has not let the characters to
understand the truth. The novel aims for hope or vision for the future. Hattie’s mother always insists her to see what cannot be seen. This is because we cannot predict the kind of problems we face in our future. It is how the people manage to solve the problem in their own way. The ‘Home’ portrayed in this novel is not of their native homeland. It is about the creation of a homeland in a Host land and what they consider as ‘Home’ depends on the individual. Like Hattie has put herself into a new life of hopes. In the beginning of the novel she worries whether she will be buried with her dogs, but at the end of the novel she embraces a new world in which she feels happy and comfortable. Gish Jen displays multi-ethnic society and the way people handling the issues personally, socially and psychologically. There is no suggestion offered from the author side to tackle the issues come up. She leaves it to the readers’ discretion.