CHAPTER - V
CREATION OF THE SELF

(Tripmaster Monkey)

The academic world across the globe is taken aback on realizing that Tripmaster Monkey (1989) is a playful rambling post modern novel. Kingston has completely deviated from the genre of memoir and has striked commonalities with James Joyce Ulysses and the poetry of Beat generation. It has received a global critical reception for creating a culture shock with its unfathomable style of presentation in defining Asian American identity. Kingston has explored the interconnected themes of alienation and assimilation through the portrayal of the character Wittman. He is presented as an assimilated young American who feels alienated from his own culture. He experiences the disaffection of youthful intellectual misconstrued by the society. He is subjected to profound separation by Americans as non European intruder. With a marked physical features as ‘Other’, he stands different from the majority of the American population. Asian Americans are often indentified as foreigners. Despite his birth, brought up, education and sharing of the dominant cultural values of America, he feels alienated due to his confused social and cultural location of South Asian identity. As a fifth generation American, he is completely assimilated and engrossed. His cultural and social identity remains to be an enigma as he is confronted
by the questions of identity, ethnicity, culture and language. He launches a spectacular angry diatribe to confront the questions: “Where do you come from?”, “Do you Speak English?” (317). At another level, *Tripmaster Monkey* scrupulously examines the question What is an American? Having debated over this issue in *The Woman Warrior* & *China Men*, Kingston revisits the issue in this book and focuses on the individuals far removed from the immigrant ancestors. Unlike his ancestors, Wittman has no country and is ignorant of the ancestral culture of China. Wittman dreams, speaks and lives in complete English. He imitates the authors and literary phrases that he has studied during his college days. LeAnne Schreiber observes that there is a provocative conundrum in the theme of *Tripmaster Monkey*. Kingston compares Wittman with Jack Kerouac, James Baldwin, Allen Ginsburg and Walt Whitman and observes that Wittman Ah Sing as an American is the product of five generations of America in California and Berkeley. But Schreiber raises the question, despite his Americanness, Wittman is perceived as Chinese. He is forced to appropriate the ways of claiming America. Kingston is of the view that the powerful way to claim Americanness is to ensure the incorporation of the stories of his ancestors into the fabric of American history. She makes a powerful strategy to claim American history and ensures the incorporation of the stories of his ancestors into the very crux of American history. Interpolating the
theatrical tradition, Wittman signals that a Chinese American play can also be a drama of the American West. He incorporates himself into the narrative of America. Kingston by creating a Chinese American protagonist, she inscribes a new character among the protesters, politicians, activists, hippies, beatniks and soldiers that populate the cultural and historical landscape of America.

The novel deals with the intertwined issues of identity and the creation of the Self. Wittman Ah Sing is driven by the dire necessity of defining himself in the domains of dominant culture. Wittman’s quest for identity and self is complicated by race and ethnicity. Although he is completely displaced from many generation of Chinese culture, his definition of self cannot ignore the Chinese ancestral culture. Wittman has to define himself at the backdrop of bicultural background. The inescapable fact is that Wittman has to oscillate and negotiate between the two cultures to make a contribution to his heritage. The enigmatic thematic concern of *Tripmaster Monkey* is that Wittman is American with ethnic Chinese identity. He must think and live beyond his cultures. He must live and represent through the cultural transition to transcend the limitations of the culture. His transition is compared with the position of a monkey who hops and dwells on the borders of the two worlds. Wittman has to create himself in a new surrounding and inhabit the third cultural
space. He displays his awareness of the bifurcation of his psyche. Though he keeps himself different from the immigrants, he is acutely conscious of the problems of the immigrants who arrived during the 19th century. He realizes that defining the Self is a process of knowing oneself, that requires multifarious facets that an individual presents to the world. As a performer, he is conscious that he should gain control over the verbal and visual codes. He is left with the option selecting the sources of his life from the cultural environment.

From the perspective of Post Modern literary criticism, Wittman is considered as a post modern hero. Tim Woods in *Beginning Post Modernism* is of the view that post modernism examines the cultural conditions of double consciousness. He is product of the constant impermanence of the world. His multiple identities and voices are the given products. In the world of multiculturalism identity becomes complicated and contradictory. Bestowed with luminal position, his desire to integrate himself is to create a complete identity. This requires him to lead the life with double consciousness subscribing to the Post modern conditions of life. For Wittman, Life becomes an act of balancing appropriately the obvious Chinese features and Americanness created by the fascination for the western canonical education. Wittman is acutely aware of the ‘I’, his self. He is always the object of another individual’s
interpretation. Though, he feels, moves, speaks like American, he is always subjected to inhabit the position of other, who has to redefine himself inevitably shaped by the external conditions.

Wittman’s ambition was to establish his own theatre, which ensures him to exert some control over his life. He plays God, as a theatrical impressionist, and in this process creates a third space which totally devoid of discrimination. He reinvents a democratic community composed of multiple voices and cultural texts. He creates a world in which every inhabitant is subject to scrutiny and introspection. In his self created brave new world, he is tied to Tana who is Caucasian and wishes to realize the universality through the marriage. He proves that society is made of individuals who learn to care for each other. He firmly believes that such communities will enhance the ‘self’, to flourish. To him other identities are formed on cultural and racial borders, except the self that he has created on his own.

The theme of *Tripmaster Monkey* is aptly interpreted in the light of Cultural studies. Cultural Studies as a contemporary stream of literary criticism, considers the modes of human production and consumption. It analytically examines and offers a critique of the actions of social groups, media, cultural events, work and leisure, institutions and popular arts. It also elucidates the literary and popular narratives that are inscribed in
human imagination. The phrase ‘American Culture’ denotes a common set of social practices to which Americans adhere. American multiculturalism is composed of several subcultures influenced by region, race, ethnic heritage, education, gender and numerous alignments. Individuals in American society align themselves several groups. Wittman Ah Sing is a Asian American and a Berkeley alumnus. He is also a poet who favors the Beats and counter culture. Cultural critics are fascinated by the social, economic and political contexts and they analyze the narratives in the light of cultural context and the strategies subscribed by the members of the subcultures to contest the dominant cultures. Cultural studies focuses attention on subversive literary forms and the narratives that empower the oppressed.

_Tripmaster Monkey_ is elucidated in the light of Cultural Studies, as the title invites comparison with trickster narratives from several cultures. The word ‘Tripmaster’ connotes the meaning of ‘trickster’ signifying the role of the individual responsible for guiding the imaginary journeys of individuals who exist on the borders between cultural consciousness and hallucinatory consciousness. Kingston’s tripmaster’s narrative suggests that the entire narrative is a trickster text. Trickster is a literary figure that appears in almost all the West Indian, Latin American, Native American & First Nations literature of Canada. In these literatures,
Trickster is described as a universal archetype and an indestructible cross-cultural incarnation and the spirit of chaos and misinterpretation. Trickster is a shadowy figure, who is understood to inhabit crossroads and borders of different worlds. He has several faces and dons many guises. He is confined to double forms of living and a shape shifter. He metamorphosises, transforms to the marginalized cultural situations. He is allied with change and constantly instigates the disruption of the status quo in all the marginalized and discriminated cultures. Interrogating long cherished rituals and beliefs, he generates outrageous laughter by subverting the traditional and conservative rituals. As a Carnival hero, he respects no taboos and violates all the restrictions. He encompasses the creative and destructive elements and carries the qualities of hero, sage, dimwit and pimp with aplomb.

Trickster inhabits the margins of history and liberates himself from the confinement of single cultural and historical period. He disrupts authority, instigates disorder, creates chaos and moves on to disappear and reappear on the demand of the circumstances. Trickster materializes whenever the power structures grow complacent. Andrew Wiget in the essay ‘His Life in His Tail: The Native American Trickster and the Literature of Possibility’ published in the edited volume by LaVonne Ruoff and Jerry W. Ward Redefining American Literary History (1990)
Glory says: “Trotting, skulking, whining, lurking, ranting, leering, laughing, always hungry, never satisfied, he is an animate principle of disruption, about to precipitate chaos...he exercises his trickery, displays foolishness...departs the circled light into the surrounding darkness” (86).

In Native American culture, the most common incarnation is Coyote. He appears as Raven, Hare, Wolverine and Spider. In American oral tradition Trickster is Br’er Rabbit. In European manifestation Trickster is Reynard the Fox, Reinhard Fuchs in German tales. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in *The Signifying Monkey* reveals that the Yoruba words ‘monkey’ and ‘riddle’ are very similar. He says that Elegba, the divine avatar of the monkey is a dweller of the cross roads with his feet on earth and heaven. All the tricksters depicted in literature and created in culture share the similar traits like liminality, energy, disruptiveness, self-indulgence and humor. Literary tricksters like Prometheus and Satan in Milton and Chinese tricksters created by Maxine Hong Kingston are specific contributions to literature. From the cultural perception, Monkey is perceived as border denizen. It is a semi divine suspended between heaven and earth, it is capable of transforming into countless forms as a plant, bird, a mosquito, a fish, demigod, a monster and even a temple. He challenges the authorities, and levels the cultural inconsistencies with the indestructible and irrepressible power.
All the literary texts centered on Trickster are characterized by paradox, contradiction and strategies of challenging oppression, authority and deconstructing stereotypes. They voice out the cultures that are silenced for centuries. Trickster texts are subversive in nature and they carry out surprise, subterfuge, excess, invention and play as the inherent literary strategies. It is to the galaxy of American literary and cultural tricksters, Kingston introduces immigrant monkey as an additional American trickster who infuses new vigour, vitality in contemporary American narratives. As a booster to the existing American multiculturalism, he brings in the cultural baggage of ancient Chinese civilization to the contemporary reality.

In *Tripmaster Monkey*, Wittman Ah Sing is inhabited by monkey. Possessed by the nature of the monkey, he identifies himself as the incarnation of the legendary hero. He becomes the contemporary American trickster. As an inhabitant of border spaces and a negotiator of cultural milieu, he comforts himself in a stark China Town. He makes himself comfortable into the mainstream culture and the Asian American Subculture. He loves his Chinese Class mate and marries a stranger, a blonde. He exposes the Asian ancestry with his postures. He dresses with multiple identities and devices a role in the service of his quest for self. He successfully manages to straddle the border between the ethnic
enclaves and the white counter culture. Literally, he moves between the cultures and alters his appearances. His comfortability with the languages and the inherent linguistic verbatim makes him to converse with the people of different linguistic backgrounds. Trapped in the cultural encirclement, he performs a balancing act nearly every hour of his life and assumes different identities. As a functional survival strategy, he develops a fluid slippery persona and the ability to negotiate marginalized cultures. Taking his cue from Monkey, Wittman transforms himself by performing new identities and escapes from uncomfortable situations.

Wittman possesses all the traits of Trickster. He creates havoc, disrupts the status quo, interrogates the upheld believes and practices and inserts humour into every situation. Wittman’s energy and enthusiasm almost like a Trickster seems unstoppable. Nothing comes in the way of his performing play. His play is the trickster text embedded in Kingston’s tricksters text. They share number of common characteristics with the larger work. Both the works position Monkey at the centre of a vast collection of cultural narratives. They are all inclusive and classified easily. Wittman’s play, like Tripmaster Monkey is disruptive, subversive, polyvocal and playful. The play allows the participants to frequently subvert the social and cultural norms. It encourages fantasy, creativity, experimentation and facilitates the genesis of new narratives in churning
out new identities. Considering the decade of sixties, as a period of chaos, social activism, spiritual experimentation, drugs, violence and demonstrations, it was presumed as the ideal decade of monkey to emigrate from China and for Trickster to take a new incarnation in American multiculturalism.

Kingston employs judicious allusions to bring in the resonances between the global culture and the traditional Chinese culture. As a product of multiculturalism, Kingston creates a cultural mosaic with *Tripmaster Monkey*. The allusions of all the novels encompass and embrace Shakespeare, Buddhism, Hollywood movies, Eastern European art films, California history, Chang and Eng, Ku Klux Klan, China Town Slang and German fiction. Drawing most heavily on the sources of Chinese folklore, literature, American popular culture, literature and film, Kingston harvests her allusions from the cultures of her universe. Kingston features first person narrator and departs from *The Woman Warrior*. She employs an omniscient narrator who knows and pervades the narrative structure. She adds that the mysterious narrator possesses a memory that reaches back to ancient China. The narrator manipulates Wittman and introduces him to an array of human situations. Kingston identifies all knowing narrator as Kuan Yin, the beloved Chinese
Goddess of Mercy, who in the traditional monkey tales hurls a boulder on Top of Monkey ensuring his immobility for five hundred years.

In the very mode of expression, *Tripmaster Monkey* has brought in a radical revision. While the first two books belong to the subgenre of “Autobiography,” the third book falls in a different category that of fiction. While the first two books may be termed as Fictional Autobiographies, the third book is not just fiction but also metafiction. *Tripmaster Monkey* is metafiction in the sense that it is a fiction which examines the fiction within it. The book is about Kingston recording a story written by the protagonist Wittman Ah Sing. Who intern is using another fiction to change the world, so it is like a box within a box (a Chinese box).

*Tripmaster Monkey* deals with the same theme, the search for an American identity. The search is begun, not by Kingston herself, but by Wittman Ah Sing, a fifth generation Chinese-American. Kingston has made Wittman a representative of the fifth generation to draw our attention to the fact that the position of the Chinese-Americans is not any better than it was for her first generation even after four generations. While most of the minorities obstinately decided to remain Orientals due to racist attitudes of the whites, there were others who were cowed down by American racism and abandoned their original race and culture and
longed to belong to the dominant American section of the society. When they tried to remain Oriental they were denied naturalization. So the only alternative was to shun their race and join the mainstream. As Elaine H. Kim describes Kazuko’s predicament in Monica Sone’s *Nisei Daughters* “The only way she can survive, in America’s ‘mainstream. . . with my oriental eyes’ is by leaving her disintegrated family and community behind”. (Kim, 1984: 51)

But it was not so in Wittman’s case. Wittman leaves behind his disintegrated family and community behind him and tries to parade as an American, even marries a white girl but soon returns home because his ‘oriental eyes’ are a dead giveaway. The homecoming is significant because it marks the emergence of the hidden Chinese side of him. Returning home is like finding the link between the past and the future.

He thinks himself to be the ‘Chosen One’ and attempts to reconstruct the long ignored heritage and culture of China by staging epic plays. He stages plays, night after night, for a week and his attempts are a grand success. After failing “to melt like rain drops in the ocean of the white society” (Kim 52), he declares in his speech to accept his identity as Chinese--American but without the hyphen between the two words: ‘Chinese--American’ is inaccurate -- as if we could have two countries.
We need to take the hyphen out – ‘Chinese American’”. (Tripmaster Monkey: 327)

The theme of ‘Claiming American Identity’ is a common theme in most of the Asian American writings. Bharathi Mukherjee in *Jasmine* is trying to show how she is fleeing from her Indian pasts:

They assumed I had a past, like them, about which I didn’t tell, too much. . . I didn’t have a child, but I had a past that I was still fleeing. Perhaps still am. (Mukherjee 34)

We find her desire to become American, “I told him I wanted a green card more than anything else in the world, that a green card was freedom” (Mukherjee, 1989: 149). Finally, she says, “I became an American in an apartment on Claremont Avenue across the street from a Barnard College dormitory (Mukherjee 165).

In *Wife* we come across these lines:

That’s a good sign, “Amit said, smiling. “You’re becoming American, but not too American; I hope . . . It’s a celebration. I mean, we have to celebrate my job and your Americanization, so go on, take a sip of beer. (Mukherjee 112)

Taking a sip of beer is a sure sign of Americanization.
Jing Mei Woo, in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, declares that while the younger generation is claiming America, their mothers are unable to break away from their past. The mothers see in their daughters an impatience for the Chinese culture:

> And then it occurs to me. They are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English. . . . They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation. (Tan 31)

The major theme of the work to be ‘identity and the self’. The objective of the minority groups is to find their individual identity and identify themselves with the mainstream. The issue of identity highlighted in studies of *The Women Warrior* can easily metamorphose into an issue of consciousness to be emphatically addressed in the present study of *Tripmaster Monkey*. The two sides of the same coin, identity implies a heavy sociological dimension while consciousness points directly to the mentality of an individual. Tripmaster blithely feeds into his own consciousness almost everything that appears to his eyes and arouses
emotion: things going in the streets and the hippy parties, books, talk stories, comic fantasies, romances, racists’ jokes, artistic beauty, and pacifist perseverance. Maxine Hong Kingston protagonist Wittman ah Sing is a Chinese American proclaiming himself for identity and recognition which forces him to join some racial group. At first he hated being a Chinese because they were not given recognition. He was settled a way of thinking that there were only two groups of people in the world, “Blacks and Whites” and he says: “... if you’re gonna make it in this world you’d better be part of one or the other.” Because he grew up in a black neighborhood, his friends were black. He had no alternative but to join the black group. “Later on in the year,” he says, “the Chicanos and Asians were beginning to get together. I quickly jumped on the band wagon. Actually I really didn’t care but I wanted and needed a group to relate with.” (Spiegel, 1973: 374-75). Thus slowly he turns towards his race and even begins to defend it.

Likewise, Wittman hates to be identified as a Chinese. He, being a fifth generation Chinese-American, is more American than Kingston, who is a first generation Chinese - American. He does not want to belong to the minority – hyphenated -- society because he was born and bred in America and regards himself as an American. His complaint, as Le Anne Schreiber puts it, is that while: “It takes one generation to lose China.
How many does it take to gain America?” (Schreiber, 9). Because he claims America, but America rejects him. He feels that he is in exile in his own home. Though he grows up like the Native American children with the same rhymes and the same cartoons, they were not willing to accept him as an American just because he has black hair, yellow skin and slant eyes. The following lines explain how much he hates to be identified as a Chinese. Kerouac describes the Chinese as “twinkling” and “little.” Wittman feels that these words refer to him and explodes:

Shit. The “twinkling little Chinese” must be none other than himself. “Twinkling”?! “Little”?! Shit. . . . Jock Kerouac. I call into question your naming of me. I trust your sight no more. You tell people by their jobs. And by their race. And the wrong race at that. If Ah Sing were to run into Kerouac - - grab him by the lapels of his lumberjack shirt. Pull him up on his toes. Listen here, you twinkling little Canuck. What do you know, Kerouac. . . You don’t know shit. I’m the American here. I’m the American walking here. . . Just for that, I showed you, I grew to six feet. May still be growing. (Tripmaster Monkey: 69-70)
The Chinese were originally not very tall. So, by telling us, “I grew to six feet,” he implies that even physically he does not resemble the Chinese.

He always refers to the other people of his race as “Then - - here they come--’orientals,’ all in a group” (*Tripmaster Monkey* 58). It sounds as if he was not one of them or at least does not want to be associated with them. Later on, he makes some concessions. He says that “the orientals--alright, the Chinese-American--were sitting together near the front” (*Tripmaster Monkey* 59) stresses on their hyphenated identity, but excludes himself. He narrates the attitude of some of the Chinese-Americans: “They’ve set up the section where we’re all supposed to come sit, which they’d done to the school cafeteria of every school he ever went to” (*Tripmaster Monkey* 59). But he never joins any of them because he felt one with the Americans.

When Judy (the girl he meets on the bus) guesses that he is a Chinese, he vehemently denies that “I not Chinese I hate being taken for a Chinaman” (*Tripmaster Monkey* 75). The lines,

Our water is your water.

Our food is your food.

Our hunger is your hunger.

Our stories are your stories. (*Tripmaster Monkey* 125)
show the desire of the Chinese to throw their lot in with the Americans uninhibitedly and their eagerness to get assimilated.

He wants to belong to America but soon realizes the futility of his efforts because all the time people refer to him as Chinese. “You Chinese?” asked Mrs. Chew and left with no other option “yes,” he says (Tripmaster Monkey 228). “You Chinese?” asked Mr. Sanchez yet again: “Yeah.” says Wittman. “It shows, huh?” (Tripmaster Monkey 241). He hates the racist feelings inherent in the American people.

His aim is to bring back the Chinese culture which is fast disappearing from the Chinese--American society due to negligence and racism. Now that he is jobless and has much time to spare, he makes use of it to fulfill his dream. He feels that most of the Chinese--Americans are ignorant of discrimination, so he wants to educate them. He says:

I’m going to start a theater company. I’m naming it The Pear Garden Players of America. The Pear Garden was the cradle of civilization, where theater began on Earth. Out among the trees, ordinary people made fools of themselves acting like kings and queens. As playwright and producer and director, I’m casting blind. That means the actors can be any race. Each member of the Tyrone family or the Lomans can be a different color. I’m including everything that is
being left out, and everybody who has no place. My idea for the civil rights movement is that we integrate jobs, schools, buses, housing, lunch counters, yes, and we also integrate theater and parties. The dressing up. The dancing. The loving. The playing. . . (Trippmaster Monkey 52)

Thus starts his war against racism:

Racism is a virulent form of prejudice. Prejudice is the detrimental, preconceived judgment of individuals or groups on the basis of their skin, colour, culture, speech patterns, mode of dress, or whatever.... Racism leads to discrimination. When we discriminate, we exclude certain groups. When we perceive a difference in others, we compare them to ourselves or our group and irrationally decide that they are inferior because they are different from us and therefore should not share our society or privileges. (Monte 15)

Racism and discrimination against the Chinese having started almost as soon as they entered the U.S. was carried on through the gold rush and railroad era. It became severe during the 1880’s. They kept the early immigrants from being naturalized and if they were naturalized they
were not allowed full participation in any activities. Discrimination still continues in one form or the other.

Kingston, through Wittman, is expressing her dislike for such discrimination. It is very clearly expressed in the last chapter, ‘One-Man Show,” where Wittman as playwright, in a long speech, says: “I want to talk to you. I’m Wittman Ah Sing, the playwright. I’m one of the American Ah Sings. Probably there are no Ah Sings in China....” He explains from where he might have got his name “Ah Sing”, “I know it’s just a sound. A vocative that goes in front of everyone’s names. Ah Smith. Ah Jones. Everyone has an ah, only our family writes ours down.” He explains:

In that Ah, you can hear we had an ancestor who left a country where the language has sounds that don’t mean anything--la and ma and wa--like music. Alone and illiterate, he went where not one other Chinese was. Nobody set him straight. When his new friends asked him his name, he remembered that those who wanted him had called, Ah Sing.” So he told the school marm, “Ah, Sing, ma’am,” and she wrote down for him the two syllables of a new American name. (Tripmaster Monkey 307)
After establishing the legitimacy of his American identity, he shows us, how the Native Americans nevertheless discriminate against him and his race. He talks of the newspaper reviews of the epic plays he has staged:

So. You were entertained. You liked the show, huh? I myself have some complaints and notes but. . . . You like the reviews? I am sore and disappointed. Come on, you can’t like these reviews. Don’t be too easily made happy. Look. Look. ‘East meets West.’ ‘Exotic.’ ‘Sino-American Theater.’ ‘Snaps, crackles and pops like singing rice.’ ‘Sweet and sour.’ Quit clapping. Stop it. What’s to cheer about? You like being compared to Rice Krispies? Cut it out. Let me show you, you’ve been insulted. They sent their food critics. They wrote us up like they were casting Chinese food… ‘Savor beauteous Nanci Lee, it says here. . . . (Tripmaster Monkey 307)

All through he is lamenting that their talent and basic idea for staging the play hasn’t been recognized by the Americans. He says that they are treating them like Chinese and not Chinese-Americans and that they certainly would not have treated the blacks in a similar manner:
They wouldn’t write a headline for Raisin in the Sun: ‘America Meets Africa.’ They want us to go back to China where we belong. They think that Americans are either white or Black. . . . I have a nightmare--after duking it out, someday Blacks and whites will shake hands over my head. I’m the little yellow man beneath the bridge of their hands and overlooked. . . . (Tripmaster Monkey 307-08)

Throughout his long speech he harps on the treatment meted out to the Chinese--Americans. To make them aware of the discrimination and to arouse in them an urge to fight back, he gives his audience several examples.

He declares in his speech that the chanting about Chinese: “East is east and west is west” (Tripmaster Monkey 308) must stop. He declares that there is no East in America and that “West is meeting West. This was all West. All you saw was West. This is The Journey in the West… They’ve got us in a bag, which we aren’t punching our way out of“(Tripmaster Monkey 308). He is trying to say that there is no separate existence for the Chinese as “Chinese” in America but everyone belongs to America and that they are all Americans. Wittman states that the Americans are discriminating against them: “I think,” he tried explaining,
that history being trapped in people means that history is embodied in physical characteristics, such as skin colors. And do you know what part of our bodies they find so mysteriously inscrutable? It’s our little eyes. . . . (Tripmaster Monkey 312)

Most of the Chinese women, in their efforts to join the mainstream, have their eyes operated upon. Wittman advises such women not to do so. In his speech he reveals:

They can’t see inside here past these slits. And that’s why you girls are slicing your eyelids open, isn’t it? Poor girls. I understand. And you glue on the false eyelashes to give your scant eyes some definition. . . . (Tripmaster Monkey 312)

He asks them to be proud of their eyes and heritage. As a responsible director and a man, he tries to stop his actresses from mutilating themselves. He also asks the other Chinese-American men to help him in trying to dissuade the women from committing such a ghastly act upon themselves. Here we can see Kingston using “Black Humour”: baleful or inept characters in a fantastic or nightmarish modern world play out their roles in what Ionesco called a
“tragic farce” in which the events are simultaneously comic, brutal, horrifying, and absurd. (Abrams 2)

The way the Chinese--Americans had their eyes, nose, chin, etc. operated upon just to call themselves Americans is horrifying and absurd. “And that one over there came back from winter break with a Jackie nose. . . . Her friends said, ‘Nose Job’” (Tripmaster Monkey 99). They used a lot of make-up and thick false eyelashes to look more like the whites. Many of them abandoned their customs and traditions in the hope that they will be accepted as Americans. Their efforts are both grotesque and funny.

Wittman is a contradictory character. Though in the beginning he claims to be an American, in the latter half of the book he sings a different song. He goes out of his way to defend his race. He gives us a very clear picture of the way the Americans treat the Chinese who want to be Americans while at the same time retaining their Chinese-ness. They are treated badly and made fun of:

All my life, I’ve heard pieces of jokes--maybe the same joke in fragments--that they quit telling when I walk in. They’re trying to drive me pre-psychotic. I’m already getting paranoid. I’m wishing for a cloak of invisibility. (TM 316)
These American racist jokes are making the Chinese-Americans feel inferiors White men let little yellow men overhear that twat joke to make them littler and yellower” *(Tripmaster Monkey* 317). The Americans are all the time trying to enslave the Chinese. Wittman continues:

They have an enslavement wish for us, and they have a death wish, that we die. They use movies to brainwash us into suicide. . . . The Yellow Man lusts after a white girl, he has to kill himself--that’s a tradition they’ve made up for us. . . . Don’t ever kill yourself. You kill yourself, you play into their hands. (TM 319)

He asks the Chinese-Americans not to fall into the trap the Americans are laying for them. He says that the Americans have another custom for the Orientals:

Deranged by gratitude, an oriental has to have a master, and will tail after a white man until enslaved. . . . Every few days they show us a movie or a T.V. episode about us owing them, therefore thankfully doing their laundry and waiting on them, cooking and serving and washing. . . . *(Tripmaster Monkey* 320)
He says that every time a Chinese makes an attempt at naturalization by marrying an American, his effort is nipped in the bud. Wittman talks of another movie where the man is killed because he loves a white girl. The name of the movie is “The Bitter Tea of General Yin.” Wittman explodes angrily: “They named him that to castrate us. General Yin instead of General Yang, get it? Again the Chinaman made into a woman” (TM 322). He complains that the Chinese are repeatedly shot, stabbed, kicked, socked, skinned, machine-gunned and blown up.

He asks the Chinese-Americans to fight against the absurd inquiry by the Americans regarding their identity: “Are you Chinese or Japanese?” by questioning the Americans in return, “Where’s our name that shows that we aren’t from anywhere but America?” (TM 326)

At the end of his long speech he realizes that it is their own fault that they are still called “Gook and Chinky China man” even though they came before Columbus because they failed to identify themselves as Americans while the others changed themselves into Americans:

For a moment a hundred years ago, we were China Men. After all, the other people in the new world were Englishmen and Frenchmen and Dutchmen. But they changed themselves into Americans, and wouldn’t let us change into Americans.
And they slurred ‘China Man’ ‘Chinaman, they said dactylically. (Tripmaster Monkey 326)

He gives us another example of how the Chinese-Americans are treated. It is his personal experience, this incident happened when he volunteered for an experiment in college for fifty bucks:

So we Chinese-hyphenated-schizoid-dichotomous Americans were gathered in this lab... The shrink or lab assistant asked us to fold a piece of paper in half and write ‘Chinese’ at the top of one half and ‘American’ at the top of the other. Then he read off a list of words. Like ‘Daring.’ ‘Reticent.’ ‘Laughter.’ ‘Fearful.’ ‘Easygoing.’ ‘Conscientious.’ ‘Direct.’ ‘Devious.’ . . . ‘Subtle.’ ‘Outgoing.’ We were to write each word either in the left hand column or the right-hand column.” (TM 328)

Wittman wishes he had torn the paper and stopped the test but instead he says that:

. . . I gave the Chinese side ‘Daring’ and ‘Laughter’. . . But my bold answers were deviated away in the standard deviation. The American side got all the fun traits. It’s scientifically factual truth now--I have a stripe down my
back. Here, let me take off my shirt. Check out the yellow side, and the American side. (TM 328)

He complains that the Americans are psychologically messing up the Chinese. He says that he was treated no better than a lab animal and that he never got over the experiment which left him with aftereffects-acid flashbacks: “I’m not making this up. I tell you, there’s a lot of Nazi shit going on in the laboratories. Don’t fall into their castrating hands”. *(Tripmaster Monkey 328)*

He calls on his people to come and prove that they too can demonstrate love and affection publicly. He throws a challenge and calls for a kissing contest. He asks them to kiss one another: “You need to be taught a lesson, accusing me of affection. I’m going to unbrainwash you from believing anymore that we’re a people who don’t kiss and don’t hug”. (TM 329)

He warns the Chinese-Americans not to call themselves “Chinese” among Americans who are ready to send them back to where they think they belong:

But ‘Chinese-American’ takes too long. Nobody says or hears past the first part. And ‘Chinese-American’ is inaccurate--as if we could have two countries. We need to take the hyphen out--’Chinese American.’ ‘American,’ the
noun, and ‘Chinese,’ the adjective. From now on: Chinese Americans. (TM 327)

He refuses to be a total Chinese and since he is not accepted as an American, he comes to accept his identity as a Chinese-American. He is trying to make a time and place for himself; the time being the twentieth century and the place America, at the same time not forgetting China. The Chinese-Americans talk of the “unreal” China as if it were real and their American reality is undone by racism. What Kingston is trying to make is a Chinese-American reality in the fictional character of Wittman within the pages of the book.

The book represents the sixties. The decade of the sixties marked by different kinds of movements: racial, political, social, sexual and educational. It started as an age of youth and optimism, but ended in gloom, pessimism and frustration. The women’s rights movement and the Civil rights movement were at their peak in the sixties. The family was disintegrating. Self-fulfillment and sexual freedom had become the most sacred tenet. Prior to the sixties, religion and utilitarian individualism were given more importance. But the sixties with its contradictory ideas left the people with unstable beliefs.

The sixties saw the birth of counterculture and hippie culture. People started living in communes. The hippies were non-conformists
and opposed all, traditions. They brought with them a lot of drugs and lived freely. Men wore their hair long and dressed flamboyantly. There was a change in every field, art, literature, music, theatre, etc. There was a newness in the theatre. Drama was moving into a poetic realm of metaphor. University campuses were full of radical politics, new styles, etc. Burning of draft cards, protest marches and student strikes were all a part of daily routine. The key word of the day was liberation--liberating that which had been repressed for too long. People wanted to choose their own style of living to have a say in the rules and structures which governed and regulated their lives.

Kingston portrays all these characteristics in *Trip Master Monkey*. As is typical of the youth of the sixties Wittman is a perfect example of a being who is intelligent but whose thought is split. His mind oscillates from one extreme to another. The book starts with Wittman contemplating suicide almost every day:

Wittman Ah Sing considered suicide every day. Entertained it. There slid beside his right eye a black gun. . . . He was aware of the run of his mind, that’s all. He was not making plans to do himself in, and no more willed these seppuku movies--no more conjured up that gun--than built this city.

(TM 3)
Morose and grim thoughts are immediately followed by casual thoughts, as if they were everyday thoughts. Perhaps they are an outcome of his loneliness and dejection. His conscience is split to such an extent that on the one hand he claims he is an American and on the other he thinks himself to be the “chosen one” to save the dying Chinese culture. He thinks himself to be in love with Nanci Lee but ends up marrying Tana on impulse. He attends parties though he is not a social being. He is a poet and a playwright. He is a university drop-out. He is an artist who creates his own world which is at war with the real world. His world is constantly threatened. He is trying to revive traditions, which is a very difficult task. The task is both painful and funny at the same time. He has a volatile temperament and is constantly at war with everything enters into silly arguments with friends and enemies alike. Lance is his only childhood friend but that does not deter him from fighting with him. He is a total misfit in this world. He himself confesses: “Oh, God. I don’t belong on this planet.”

Wittman is also paranoid about several things:

    Electric street—cars rage ringing through my room.
    Automobiles run their way over me. A door slams.
    Somewhere a window—pane falls clattering: I hear its big splinters laugh, its little one snicker.... Someone is climbing
the stairs. Coming, coming incessantly…. A girl screams: Ah tais-toi, je ne veux plus… Someone calls. People are running, overtake each other…. More than one pane of glass has fallen; an entire glass side of a building has crashed down, but the next day, if he remembers to look, the Street will not be covered with glass. The electric cars do not run on this Street at four in the morning. (TM 42-43)

He is suspicious of the natives. He feels that they are always cracking racist jokes and that they stop as soon as they spot him: “I’m already getting paranoid. I’m wishing for a cloak of invisibility (TM 316). Lance also calls him paranoid: “You’re really paranoid man” (TM 117). He is suspicious of Chubby Checker (Chubby Checker was the King of twist), “Paranoid again. Like we were last summer. What if Chubby Checker does not mean us well? What if Chubby Checker is up to no good?” (TM 110). He feels that there are many animals in the disguise of human beings around him. He says: “Let me warn you. Some of them only appear to be human, there are non-humans in disguise as men and women amongst us” (TM 80). He is always gripped by some sort of fear. He confesses that “I am always afraid” (TM 167). He is paranoid about marriage as well, “I face the utter paranoia of marriage” (TM 174). He feels that the natives are trying to get him and the other Chinese-Americans paranoid: “The way they get you paranoid is you
can’t tell whether they’re admiring the car and the chick, or they’re giving you racist red ass” (TM 212).

In the book Kingston records the anti-war (Vietnam) feelings that existed among the people of the sixties. Wittman is against war and tries to dissuade men and women from joining the war. For instance, in the chapter, “Linguists and Contenders,” when Louise, the salesgirl, tells him that she is going to meet a couple of guys in the navy, he bursts Outs ‘Be a responsible citizen. ‘Fuck the war out of them, Louise,” he said.’ When she replies that she only dates them and nothing else, he says. “AS long as nice girls like you think that men look cute in uniforms, they’re going to keep warring and killing” (TM 56). While working in the toy shop, he advises customers not to buy toy guns or toys which resemble guns or those which have triggers. Wittman says that “for the good of the kid, your grandson, you should not buy him this thing that is really a gun” (TM 46). When the old lady tries to argue that it is only a basket ball game, he tries to dissuade her by saying “you don’t want the kid to grow up to be a killer, do you?” (TM 47) He asks her not to buy it because the toy has a trigger with which the boy would have to shoot the ball and might grow up liking the feel of a gun or the feeling to pull the triggers. Even the threat that he might lose his job does not bother him. When the old lady asks him: “Are you one of those people against war toys?” he openly declares that “Yeah, I’m against war toys. I’m anti-war. Look,
I’m looking after your grandkid better than you are if you’re going to let him grow up to be a draftee” (TM 47). In a conversation with Mr. Sanchez in the unemployment office he declares that “I want to save the world from the bomb” (TM 241). At another time he declares: “No guns. No bombs, I’m using my deepest brains to ban bombs”. (TM 143)

Wittman’s mother is also against war. She tells him not to go to war:

But now you’re draft-age I’m not sending you off to Vietnam, I’m not helping drop the H-bomb. Don’t you think about Viet Nam? What’s the matter for you? You’re too carefree, like your father. I want you to run for Canada. Go. (TM 270)

and in reply Wittman says that “I do think about Viet Nam, Ma. I’m against it. . . .” (TM 270)

Wittman is a draft dodger. On Gabe’s advice he decides to get married as well as become a priest. Gabe gets Wittman married to Tana and says that “the exemption for married guys is going to stop any day” so ordains him, “I ordain thee a minister of the Universal Life Church,” making his excuse not to join the war extra strong. Tana marries Wittman not so much for the reason that she loves him but to save him from the
drafts “I’d be glad to save you from the draft Wittman,” she says (TM 163). He asks his mother to conduct anti—war campaigns. He says that:

Ma, if you can stir up a war with your dancing, you can stop one, right? Why don’t you and the aunts make up an Anti—War Bond show, and see what happens? If it doesn’t work, I’ll go to Canada. (TM 270)

He also expresses his idea to hide till the war is over so that he does not have to fight in the Vietnam war or any other war, “he made up his mind: he will not go to Vietnam or to any war” (TM 340).

The book also records the hippie culture of the times “Hippies are many things, but most prominently the bearded and beaded inhabitants” (Howard, 1982 208). The young men and women wore their hair long and unruly. Wittman is an example of it, “too much hair,” said Auntie Sadie. “Much too hairy.” “You go shave,” said mother. “Shave it off Shave it off:” (TM 179). His mother does not understand their passion for long and unruly hair, but some of the aunts understand and try to explain to her:

‘Hair, Big City style, isn’t it, dear?’ said Auntie Dolly of San Francisco, ruffling his hair. ‘Beard in high style, Ruby. Wittman Big City guy now.’ The ladies at his mother’s table
were comforting her. ‘Hairy face, fashion on a plate,’ said Auntie Sophie. (TM 180)

The youth of the time also wore brightly coloured clothes, Nanci Lee, for example. There was “a wildness in her clothes and something about her dry hair” (TM 22). Wittman confesses that he is a hippie, but a hippie, where music is concerned, “I’m hip.” said Wittman “I’m hip to accordion time” (TM 49). He loves music so much that he makes it a point to attend jazz festivals.

Drugs was another feature of the sixties. Several drug addicts appear in the novel. Wittman at one point used drugs. While working in the toy department, Wittman meets a “Yale Younger Poet.” The Yale Younger Poet is a drug addict. The conversation between the “poet” and Wittman is as follows:

“Have a seat,” he said, passing Wittman a roach in a paper-match holder.

“No thanks. I’ll have some coffee, though . . . . I used to dope. I don’t dope anymore. I’ve seen all there is to see on dope; the trips have been repeating themselves, looping like Dead of Night. I liked dope; I learned a lot. I felt religious. I felt communal. I believed in all sorts of things: the possibility of getting so far out that we pop through to
another reality. Change one’s head, change the universe. The paranoia was driving me nuts, however. Too ripped. I don’t like getting wasted anymore”. (TM 48)

In the bus on the way to Lance’s party, Judy Louis, the Chinese-American girl, occupies the seat beside him and makes conversation with him even though it is obvious that he does not want to be pulled into conversation. Suddenly Judy Louis appears like a wild bear to him:

It seemed a long ride; this ‘voice kept going on beside his ear. He looked at the girl again, and she looked blue—black in the dark. He blinked, and saw sitting beside him a blue boar. . . . Little shining eyes. Not an illusion because the details were very sharp. (TM 77)

After they both get down from the bus, he talks to himself, “what the fuck had that been about? Nevermind. It’s gone. Forget it. It doesn’t mean a thing. No miracle. No miracles forevermore, because they may be drug flashes” (TM 81). Though he stopped abusing drugs, his mind still goes on trips.

Another scene which was popular during the sixties was the youth parties:

The street was jam-packed with cars and music, no room in the air for one more decibel. The trees held loud speakers in
their arms; their bass hearts were thudding. Wittman made his way among the bodies, some already fallen on the lawn. Above huddles of four or six, there hung oval clouds of smoke, like thought balloons. (TM 81)

Another scene of the sixties depicted in the book is:

Lance flipped the picture again, and the sun was again important and warm. Because we saw it this way first? The audience, patient on dope, and never tiring of taking out a somewhat aphasic brain and playing with it, were wowed. (Tripmaster Monkey 93)

Yet another drug scene is recorded in the books is:

Where the tube was on. He sat himself down and was intercepted by a joint, which he passed on. eschewing the taking of a bit. Contact high already all over the house. The picture wasn’t coming in, but the ‘viewers were entranced, chuckling, commenting. “Wow.” “Oh, wow.” “Do you see what I see?” “Beautiful, yeah.” Wittman had not tried the snow show straight before. (TM 94)

These scenes make it clear as to how the youth spent their time; attending parties and high on drugs.
During the sixties, the institution of the family was constantly threatened. This is another aspect which is recorded in the book. Though Wittman had both his parents, they lived separately. Zeppelin Ah Sing left Wittman and his mother during the Second World War and never came back to live in the same house. He lived mostly in camps. Wittman’s grandmother (PoPo) was abandoned by Zeppelin and Ruby:

Your father drove high, high; he wound around in the mountains so I didn’t know east or west.... At the top of the mountains, they stopped, and your father lifted me down from the pick—up. He carried me. He said, ‘Upsy Daisy.’ Your mother handed me the blanket and said ‘spread the blanket under that tree, PoPo.’ They put the bag of duck on the ground.... Those Kai dai got in the truck and drove away.

. . . (TM 264)

PoPo complains to the old man who later marries her: “I have been forsaken by ungrateful children, ‘Aiya,’ the old man said, ‘no-good children. Come with me. Come home with me. I’ve been seeking a wife”. (TM 266)

Let us now examine the book as a postmodernist novel. In these unconventional books, the boundary lines between different genres are done away with. Two different genres coexist and are interlinked.
Kingston’s first two books are perfect examples where two genres coexist. Though she claims that *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* are non-fiction, it is not true because Kingston has taken facts and used them in such a way that they coexist with legends, fancy, etc. Hutcheon says that *China Men* can be termed as the novel and autobiography”.

(Hutcheon, 9)

In postmodernist fiction, we usually find the participation of the author. The author is an omniscient narrator. In *Tripmaster Monkey*, Kingston has created Wittman to put forth her ideas. It is through him that she is fighting a war against racism which is denying her and her race their American identity. She is radical in her views and places the book in the sixties to match the mood. She makes her presence felt at the end of the chapters by making comments like

Our Wittman is going to work on his play for the rest of the night. If you want to see whether he will get that play up, and how a poor monkey makes a living so he can afford to spend the weekday afternoon drinking coffee and hanging out. (TM 35)

and “Our monkey man will live--he parties, he plays--though unemployed. To see how he does it, go on to the next chapter”. (TM 65)
Keeping in tradition with the postmodern features, the book has no proper order. It starts with Wittman entertaining thoughts on suicide, then the next minute his mind wanders elsewhere. Kingston makes it appear as if Wittman were claiming America on the one hand, and on the other she makes him write epic plays from the very first chapter to bring back Chinese culture. She portrays him as an American citizen on the one hand and as a Chinese Messiah on the other. Wittman’s epic play is not narrated to us in a continuous form but it is narrated in bits and parts through his conversation with others or his deliberate recital to an audience or by mono acting. Kingston gives us a series of perceptions and leaves us to draw our own conclusions.

The book is an inter-text, another feature of the post-modernist fiction. In the Acknowledgements she clearly states:

Thanks To friends whose stories inspire my stories: Earil Kingston for the railroad reader of the West, the man with the addictive sperm, the Osaka Stock Exchange, and more.

James Hong for his role in *The Barrets of Wimpole Street*….

Jack Chen for his Pear Garden in the West, etc.

The book incorporates the paratactical style, a feature of the postmodernist fiction. The book is a Parataxis. M.H. Abrams defines paratactical style as:
One in which the members within a sentence, or else a sequence of complete sentences, are put one after the other without any expression of their connection or relations except (at most) the noncommittal connective, “and.”

(Abrams 191)

In *Tripmaster Monkey* Kingston is not playing with words or sentences but with diverse imagery, culled from varied sources. She is making the Chinese and American cultures coexist knowing fully well that they will never meet and in the process the seam is visible to one and all.

Her paratactical style is evident in the way she brings in Rilke’s *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* and puts it within *Tripmaster Monkey*. She has used the romanticism of Rilke as against the reality of the modern grey city of San Francisco. In the bus Wittman feels like a convict in the grey and grim city. People’s postures, gestures, their walks, their noseblowing, their way of dressing and their general behaviour offend him. It is for such “gone days” Wittman carries, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* in his pea coat and starts reading to the passengers. Kingston juxtaposes the two different scenes; the eloquent banquet scene from Rilke:
… always, whenever the family entered, the candles were burning in the ponderous branched candlesticks, and in a few minutes one forgot the time of day and all that one had seen outside. This lofty and, as I suspect, vaulted chamber was stronger than everything else. (TM 8)

and the depressing scene of San Francisco city. None of the passengers complained because “It was pleasant, then, for them to ride the bus while Rilke shaded and polished the city’s grey and golds” (TM 9). Kingston’s book, like Rilke’s, is a bildungsroman; a type of novel concerned with the education, development and maturing of a young protagonist or Kunstler roman; a type of novel concerned with the making of an artist, but while Rilke has a hero, Kingston has an anti-hero.

There is yet another Parataxis when Kingston places the Chinese epic against the Chinese-American reality. The monkey God is placed against the monkey character of Wittman. The Chinese epic is Romances of the Three Kingdoms and Wittman reenacts this in his “fake book.” As John Leonard says, Romances of the Three Kingdoms is “a kind of Chinese Terry and the Pirates” (Leonard, 768). In this book Wittman Ah monkey fights against racism and communism along with his other Chinese-American friends. In the first part of the epic, the “Monkey King” collects and trains an army but fights the war alone: “I’ll go by myself” he says. “It’s best to meet the enemy one by one on his own turf.
I’ll stop him from coming here to ruin our country…” (TM 137-38)

Wittman imagines that if his epic was to be screened he would simultaneously show another epic story with the help of a split screen. As John Leonard says, The original epic “glorifies a third-century revolt of Liu Pei and his mentor. Chu-ko Liang, against the military dictatorship of Ts’ao Ts’ao” (Leonard, 771). The character in Wittman’s epic is also named Liu Pei. He has two friends, Chang Pei and Gwen Goong (the war God). The three heroes swear to be brothers and fight for a common cause. Their war is against communism. Their friendship is a sign of community living, a ritual, one thousand six hundred and twenty-nine years old which was brought to the Gold Mountain by their great-great-grandfathers. Their ritual of friendship was invented in the “Peach Orchard.” “The Oath in the Peach Orchard” was performed continuously from the first time the oath was taken. Suddenly, for no reason, the theatre died. He wants to revive the theatre by staging these epic plays.

But the theatre that he wants to create is an American theatre and not the Chinese theatre of olden days. His theatre is an activist theatre fighting the present day enemies, racism and communism. At the same time he wants to establish communal living (a feature of the sixties). He expresses his idea in these words:

But, Uncle, we bad. Chinaman freaks. Illegal aliens. Outlaws. Outcasts of America. But we make our place--this
one community house for benevolent living. We make theater, we make community, and he succeeds: “The one hundred and eight bandits, banished from everywhere else, build a community” (Tripmaster Monkey 261). Through his theatre he not only wants to entertain but also to educate (instruct and please): N0 entertain and educate the solitaries that make up a community, the play will be a combination revue-lecture. You’re invited” (TM 288)

As Leonard says:

His play is a “fake war.” He’ll substitute his theater for all the wars in the history of the world. From Monkey King and Havoc Monster…. he will ordain a Peaceable Kingdom....

(Leonard 171)

Another technique used by the postmodernist writers is metafiction. Though the term ‘metafiction’ is fairly new, the practice is quite an old one. Its wide usage started during the sixties. Even then it was not willingly accepted. Most of the public did not respond to it as it stood against all the principles that they had come to accept as fiction. Metafiction is fiction which explores the style and theme of fiction itself:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status
as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. (Waugh 2)

*Tripmaster Monkey* is metafiction in the sense that it is a fiction which examines the fiction within it. The book is about Kingston recording a story written by Wittman who in turn is using another fiction to change the world, so it is like a box within a box (a Chinese box). One opens into another and whoever the author, he/she has to create what these characters do. These non-traditional works display self-consciousness and are mainly concerned with metafiction. The central character presented in these works is usually:

… lonely, alienated, disaffected, skeptical; these characters also feel themselves victimized by a repressive, cold social order to such an extent that their lives seem meaningless, drab, fragmented; in response to this powerful sense of personal isolation and violation, these characters decide to create or invent a system of meaning which will help to supply their lives with hope, order, possibly even some measure of beauty. (McCaffery, 4)

These characters are so bored and insecure that when they do start some system they get immersed in them to such an extent that they become controlled by their creations.
Wittman is very much a metafictional character. He is bored, frustrated, lonely and alienated. At the time we are introduced to him, he is contemplating suicide, which is proof of how dejected he is in life. He is paranoid, loves to read. He is a “fool for literature.” As Leonard puts it, “this Wittman is stoned on books” (Leonard 768). He is a misfit in the real world. He finds himself to be a victim of American racism. He decides to create a System to fight it. Thus the activist theatre comes into existence. He becomes so involved in reading, writing and creating his system that he loses himself in it. One day, he realizes it and says: “Wittman, the fool for books, ought to swear of reading for a while, and find his own life”. (TM 168)

He stages his plays which are a great success among the Chinese-Americans as well as Americans but he is not very happy about it, and talks his heart out in front of his audience. Through this speech he achieves his goal of making his race aware of the injustice meted out to them and to fight and not give in.

As quoted from Mas’ud Zavarzadeh’s The Mythopoeic Reality:

‘metafiction’ is ultimately a narrational meta-theorem whose subject matter is fictional systems themselves and the molds through which reality is patterned by narrative conventions. . . Metafiction more than other modes of transfiction is conscious of its own fictivity, and, in contrast to the
interpretive novel, which operates with the aesthetic assumptions of verisimilitude, exults over its own fictitiousness, which it uses as the very terms of its narrative ontology--it is a “mask which points to itself.” . . . This intense self-reflexiveness of metafiction is caused by the fact that the only certain reality for the metafictionist is the reality of his own discourse; thus, his fiction turns in upon itself, transforming the process of writing into the subject of writing. The credibility of fiction, therefore, is reestablished not as an illuminating commentary on life but as a meta-commentary on fiction itself. (McCaffery 5)

Wittman, as Nicci Gerrard says, is an extraordinary and unforgettable creation” (Gerrard, 1989s 28). Like a “Messiah” he wants to guide his people to find themselves an identity and to bring about communal living. “Wittman is a ‘tripmaster,’ a friendly guide to the stoned in their travels through acid-time” (Leonard 768). The word “acid-time” stands for the sixties. Like the Indian monkey God “Hanuman” who brings Lord “Rama” and “Sita who were separated by the evil “Ravana” together, Wittman brings the Chinese culture back to the Chinese-Americans. He is, as Kingston calls him, “Hanuman, the white monkey”. (Tripmaster Monkey 290)