Maxine Hong Kingston has carved out a niche for herself as a chronicler of human experience. She is one among the few writers who believe that writers have extreme responsibility to the public and society. She firmly believes that the very purpose of her writing is to take people’s perception and pave the way for the social change and enlightenment. Experimenting with new narrative forms, she has created a perfect combination of legend, myth, history, memoir, folktale, anecdote, autobiography into a genre of her own invention. Writing as a representative of South Asian American immigrants, she wrote the living experiences of womankind fantasizing their careers as nurses, teachers, mother and daughters. Claiming no specific influence on her writing, she always feels that she is a born writer. In her interview with Kay Bonetti she expressed her firmness: “While I’ve had problems of speaking, I’ve always been a writer” (Bonetti. 34). Kingston describes her early attempts of writing as secretive. As a child she faced taboos that prevented her from writing forbidden things. This is obviously reflected in the opening sentence of *The Woman Warrior*. She always remembers that her first piece of creative writing is from a flash of inspiration. She expressed when she was nine years old, she found that a poem coming out oblivious to everything. She never lost the opportunity to write and understood that
writing is an essential to her very existence. She expressed: “I breathe, I eat, I sleep, I write. I also write to communicate with my fellow beings. Creating myself as an American and Chinese American and American culture and Chinese American culture as beneficial by products”. (Jil Alderson 2979)

Kingston always described herself as essentially a solitary writer. This is borne out of her childhood experience of concealing her writing. Even after she had acquired popularity, she wrote in a scant place. She remains intensively a private writer despite her involvement in collaborative communal writing. In another acknowledgement, she has considered Asian American writing especially ‘talk story’ is communal. Despite the cultural alienation and solitary action, she confirms that it transforms writing into a communal action. The actual process of writing is an intensive experience of creation, recreation, crafting and revising. The Woman Warrior and China Men won her the credit and lifetime passion for writing and rewriting. The stories that were subsequently written down became the volumes of memoirs in which the saga of the experiences of her extended family is depicted. Kingston has worked for several decades to acquire vividness, clarity and grace in her articulation. For her writing is a lengthy and reflective process which entails more than simple exercises. In an interview with Neila C. Seshachari, Kingston
describes writing has its origins “in the living that you do before” (Weber Studies. An Interdisciplinary Humanities Journal. 1995. 7-26). Almost bringing back the reminiscence of Wordsworthian perception of poetry, Kingston observes that Writing is the product of experience and thoughtful recollection of that experience.

Seriously probing into the aspects of writing, Kingston is of the view that identifying discipline for writing is the major problem that one encounters. She describes writing as a painful act and an activity that she sometimes unconsciously shelves. She revealed that in the initial stages of her career that her early writing schedule is intervened by other tasks. Her success in writing lies in conjuring up visual images and translating them into luminous prose. But her creative process is involved in drawing and sketching ideas, producing visual representations of her thoughts. In the creative process, she says that her own drawings become words and the words reveal stories and scenes. She displays ignorance in recognizing a pattern until writing thickens. After the publication of China Men, Kingston elaborated two strategies for producing a text. She described a variety of automatic writing that bears resemblance to appearances. The second method focused on generating words in a process akin to free writing that sets down a vision on the pate created and shaped by the words. She notes wryly that this method has generated
a great deal of text. *China Men* is an example of this method of writing. Kingston has produced at least eight complete drafts of the manuscript to revise the original composition.

As a serious writer of human experience, Kingston is bestowed with occasional criticism that her writing is didactic and a cart load of moral lessons. She is even accused of being pedagogic. She is overwhelmed with the kind of reception that *The Woman Warrior* received. Paul Skenazy and Tera Martin in *Conversations with Maxine Hong Kingston* (1998) summarizes the impact of *The Woman Warrior*:

“It is estimated that (Kingston’s) work is the most anthologized of any living American writer, and that she is read by more American college students than any other living author” (104). All the reviews by Jane Kramer, William McPherson, *Washington Post Book World, Publisher’s weekly, International Fiction review* have attested the narrative power of Kingston. The fact that *The Woman Warrior* has been translated into several languages and has been the subject of hundreds of book reports, term papers and research projects, master’s degree and doctoral dissertations speaks for the enduring and profound power of Kingston’s narration. It has appealed to the readers of all the ages, genders, ethnic and national backgrounds. It has entertained the academic world for more
than two decades and continues to sustain the interest of the academicians.

Kingston’s second book *China Men* has garnered lavish praise from the readers and reviewers. John Leonard in *New York Times* described the impact of the book as a magical exhalation of the voices of survival. The novelist Mary Gordon in *New York Times Book Review* says that Kingston’s understanding of community is expressed in perfect prose. The readers are bowled by beguiling narrative voice that captivated Kingston’s entrancing prose. Anne Collins in “Intoxicating Myths, Fermented Dreams” offers an emotional and creative response saying that Kingston explores the possible truths of family history. The critical responses of Paul Gray, Frances Taliaferro of Harpers and Tamar Jacoby have offered appropriate understanding of Kingston’s narratives. The panoramic narration of Kingston probed the issues of emigration, persecution, work, endurance, ritual, change, loss and eternal intervention with aplomb and tenacity. Jean Strouse in the *Newsweek* observed that *China Men* is a landmark American memoir.

*Hawai’i One Summer*, a hardbound collection eleven prose pieces reflects a variety of subjects representing the significant elements of Vietnam War. The essay about the California poet Lew Welch rejected by the *Times* was included by Kingston in the collection as her tribute to
the poet. This is admired by the critics and considered as an accurate representation of immigrant experience across the globe. Kingston has surprised her devoted readers, with *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* which is talk story of a mixed genre memoir. Considered as a rollicking and postmodern American novel, it has won much awaited critical acclaim. Anne Tyler and Herbert Gold observed that Kingston has brought in Magic Realism of Latin American fiction blending Lenny Bruce and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

As part of the cultural and literary criticism bestowed on her writings, she was addressed as “Living Treasure of Hawaii” almost echoing the recognition “Living Treasure of Japan”. She was honoured as a ‘Living Treasure’ by Honolulu Buddhist sect in a formal ceremony with traditional Sanskrit chants and incense at the Hoopa Hongwanji Temple on the Pali in 1980. Kingston is one of the youngest to receive the designation and the first Chinese American to be honored. It is pertinent to remember that the tradition of naming a person as ‘Living Treasure’ originated in ancient China and flourishes in Japan. Now due to the presence of immigrant community in Hawai’i, it has become an American ritual. Although, Kingston’s fame rests on the award winning works, her prolific writing has produced some poetry and prose. Many of her essays are published in national and international periodicals. Toeing
the line of nonfiction, Kingston has sparked criticism for labeling her works as pure fiction. Convinced of Elliot’s observation that poetry is also nonfiction, she settled for creative memoir growing up in Chinese American Literature.

The objective of the thesis is to examine the works of Maxine Hong Kingston in the light of the disruption of the boundaries between the genres of literature, specially at the behest of paramount significance garnered by Chinese American literature. The thesis titled as ‘Reconfiguration and Reenactment of the Self: A Study of Maxine Hong Kingston’s Oeuvre’ makes a scholarly probe into the thematic concerns of all her works. The first chapter ‘Introduction’ traces the evolution of South Asian American literature. While examining the issues of immigration, the chapter presents a synoptic view of socio literary evolution of South Asian American literature. It offers the bio critical information of the first generation of South Asian American writers exploring the thematic concerns of their works. The literary contribution of the second generation of the South Asian American Writers is elucidated in the light of the growing concern to address the experiences of immigrants across the world. Providing a literary account of the contemporary writers, the chapter renders the bio critical portrayal of Maxine Hong Kingston. The thematic concerns of her works and the
significant literary characteristics of her contribution is analytically presented in the chapter.

The second Chapter ‘South Asian Feminist Representation’ offers a specific study of her most popular memoir and non-fiction *The Woman Warrior*. Examining the mainstream literary history of Feminism, the emergence of South Asian Feminism in the light of the thematic elucidation of *The Woman Warrior* is meticulously carried out. There is a scrupulous reading of the history of Feminist literary criticism in relation to the elucidation of *The Woman Warrior*. The characteristics of South Asian Feminism are discussed and their manifestation in the thematic aspects is presented with aplomb. The chapter offers the post colonial classification of First World, Second World, Third World and Fourth World Feminism. South Asian Feminism is part of Third World Feminism. It deals with the survival and, existential problems of South Asian women. The experiences of immigration, the burden of carrying the inglorious tradition, the inability for assimilation and the struggle to live in unpredictable future are some of the crucial aspects represented by South Asian feminism and the chapter discusses the reflection of these in the character of Woman Warrior.

The third chapter entitled ‘Thematic Issues’ examines the aspects of narrative structure, character development, motives, allusions apart
from the serious emphasis on ‘Silence’ & ‘Voice’ that pervades in *The Woman Warrior*. A thorough analysis of these aspects is presented with the illustration of textual references. The fourth chapter entitled ‘The Dreams of Four Generations’ offers a thematic and analytical elucidation of *China Men*. The analysis posits *China Men* as an alternative to Feminist centrality of *The Woman Warrior*. The chapter offers the discussion of the issues of masculinity in Asian American literature and culture. The other major thematic issues like myth, symbols, the narrative structure and character development are discussed offering a scholarly convincing portrayal of the masculine world at the backdrop of Chinese tradition.

The fifth chapter ‘Creation of the Self’ examines *Tripmaster Monkey* in all its critical elucidation. Almost on the lines of the previous chapters, it offers an alternative reading of *Tripmaster Monkey* in the light of cultural studies. The major themes of the novel ‘identity and the creation of the self’ are discussed as the post modern traits. The protagonist Wittman’s quest is defined as an attempt of alienation and assimilation. The literary devices of language, allusions, symbols, the narrative structure and the development of the characters are discussed with the textual illustrations. The chapter further presents the
reminiscences of mixed genre memoir from *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*.

The sixth chapter ‘Reconfigurations & Reenactments’ presents a brief analytical understanding of her recent works *Hawai’i One Summer*, *To Be the Poet* and *Fifth Book of Peace*. *Hawai’i One Summer* is discussed as the representative novel of the eco politics and eco feminist representation. *To Be the Poet & Fifth Book of Peace* are examined with critical and textual illustration as bench marks of Kingston’s popularity as an activist and pacifist writer. ‘The Conclusion’ signifies that Kingston’s contribution towards the evolution of Asian American peace literature is recognized as a major breakthrough in the very history of epistemology.

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