

Memories of the Past: Analysis with reference to Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club*

BinuJerlineHarrini.S^{1*}, Dr. Shanthichitra²

¹P.hD Research Scholar, Department of English, College of Science and Humanities, SRMIST, Kattankulathur, Chennai

²HoD, Associate Professor, Department of English, College of Science and Humanities, SRMIST, Kattankulathur, Chennai
hod.@srmist.edu.in

Abstract

Literature is an individual's and society's expression of life. When books are brought into contact with real life, they become literature. Writers use their words to express their sadness, joy, and despair. Literature aids in the comprehension of a particular period's history, as well as the life histories of the individuals who lived at that time.

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Amy Tan is one of those writers who expresses themselves through her own personal experiences. She expresses her feelings and opinions through writing. Her personal life has had a significant impact on her work. Amy Tan has struggled to fit into Chinese culture. She had always aspired to be an American in order to win her mother's affection. Tan depicts a number of female characters in the story who are all dealing with oppression in some way. Her books have made the world aware of the challenges that Chinese women confront. The Joy Luck Club is one of the most popular and well-known novels. Tan has incorporated her feelings as well as her mother's mystery stories into the novel The Joy Luck Club, which will be examined in my paper.

Tan's novel The Joy Luck Club is about four Chinese women immigrants in San Francisco. It depicts their bewilderment with American culture as well as their efforts to inculcate Chinese ancestry in their girls. The Americanized girls are having a hard time pleasing their Chinese mother. It is always true that the children of the migrants always face a psychological trauma, which is clearly exhibited in the novel trying to find their trueself.

Chinese people first went to the United States to escape the economic crisis that happened in China around 1850s. They were blue collar workers, did small jobs like laundry, domestic work and so on. And so they were not given equal status in America. So these daughters of the migrant moms in the novel *Joy luck club* wanted to look like Americans and not Chinese. From the very beginning women were considered inferior to men who have exerted their complete domination over women. Women always gained secondary position in their family. The multiple victimizations that women faced back in times are seen in the novel.

The novel is presented as sixteen stories that are intertwined to form two generations of mothers and daughters living in America. Tan brought out the traumatic side of women from their homeland and they spread this word to the underworld. Her personal experiences are also exhibited through her works. As Appignanesi and Maitland puts into words

I'm not who I was supposed to be. If you look at where I was born and the family in which I grew up and the kind of life that normally happens to people who grow up in such worlds, I stepped out of the world, rather like Gibreel. I have had the sense of

having frequently to reconstruct my life. So that thing about shifting yourself and wondering if there's anything left of the original person or not is something that's very internal to me...

The past acts as a very important aspect in representing oneself. In Amy Tan's novel *Joy luck club*, Jing-mei Woo, June acts not only as a narrator but as the voice of Tan. The character connects all the stories in the novels. Amy Tan manifests herself as June. After so many years, Tan learns about her mother's twin babies which she abandoned back in China which made a huge impact in tan. In 1987 tan travelled to China to meet her half-sisters accompanying her mother which was the inspiration for the novel. She gives a glimpse of her past in the novel through the character June. The point of view in the novel varies from narrator to narrator. Every narrator talks about their own feelings. The character June acts as a bridge between two generations. She speaks for herself and also for her recently deceased mother. June discovers the Chinese essence within herself after moving to China to find her half-sisters. Amy Tan, by using the dual narrative voice in the novel makes the Chinese women have an authority over their own voice. Tan has given all the characters a chance in the novel to tell their story. Personal narrative voice is adopted by tan while June tells the story. June has two voices, her own voice as well her mother's voice. This difference can be identified by the readers. The relationship of tan and her mother is what is reflected in the relationship between June and her mother. As Tan herself says in an interview,

My mother's letters to me, and my letters to her. In part, they contradicted the selective memory that recalled mostly the bad things that went on between us, and little of the expressions of love. I knew she loved me, and the way she worried about me. "You're like me," she'd say, "and that's why we understand each other.

Amy tan believed that memories are always stored in our consciousness, she says that "if you've been somewhere and associate a particular smell with that place, the smell is going to evoke that memory" (Chung).

As a child looking up at clouds, we imagine random shapes and patterns assigning human characteristics to objects. We believe every toy, cloud and object has a story to narrate tous.

Adults barely understood our enthusiasm, faking attention and always sidelining us. The thrill and excitement of a ferris-wheel gradually builds up as one reaches high, closer to the top. Unfortunately while growing and maturing into adulthood, the imagination drops down, vanishing in air with the pressure of life. The concentric circles of imagination with infinite diameter have shrunk, with limited space to breath. Occasionally, we need to be tapped of the enclosed walls around us, to see the wide world, full of stories/narratives to share.

According to currie, "Narratology is the theory and study of narratives" (1). Narrative is a series of events that occurs in one's life which is recounted later and it is "inescapable as language in general" (Currie 2). As a unit of innumerable groups, every individual has unique, different combinations and variations of stories to narrate. Concurring with this, Mark Currie in his work *Postmodern Narrative Theory* says that "narrative is central to the representation of identity of groups such as regions, nations, race and gender" (Currie 2).

Amy Tan is a virtuoso at depicting mother-daughter interactions through various narrative styles. The tale depicts the enormous struggle that exists between mothers and daughters in immigrant homes. Tan has used the voices of both the mother and the daughter to brilliantly convey the essence of culture, tradition, and human emotions. As a result, Amy Tan's past has a significant impact on the novel *Joy Luck Club*'s sequence and narration.

References

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