



HYPHENATED EXPERIENCE IN AMY TAN'S *THE HUNDRED SECRET SENSES*

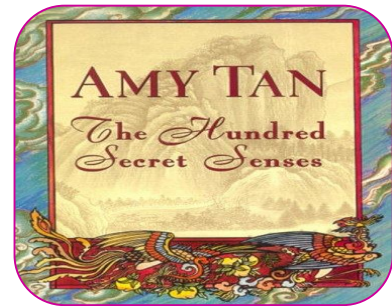
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ABSTRACT:

Amy Tan, Asian-American writer brings out the experience of women, feeling of isolation and mother-daughter relationship. Her works focuses on stifling shift of three generational existences in their homeland China and their new abode America. It not only means an individual's shifting from one place to another but a group moving in search of new destinies. Their shifting condition oscillates between twin identities, twin culture, twin minds-set from their roots and routes they have taken. Their oscillation results from pain and sufferings with their strong emotional bonding of their cultures, traditions and values. The disrupting traumatic condition, that one experiences while leaving the country of origin involuntarily changes, their attitude and thinking not only of the past but also the present and the future as well. In The Hundred Secret Sense Tan lucidly highlights the immigrants of Chinese diaspora to America after the tortured memory of the Sino – Japan war and the civil war between the communists and the nationalists during 1937 -1949. Globalisation marks the culture and retains the connection between the homeland and the new land.



KEYWORDS: *The Hundred Secret Senses, Amy Tan's Novels, Chinese Folklores*

Hyphenated Experience in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*

Asian Americans are Americans of Asian descent. The US census Bureau definition of Asians as "Asian" refers to a person having origins in any of the Indian sub continent. The term Asian American was used informally by activists in the 1960 s with sought of an alternative to the term Oriental, arguing that the latter was derogatory and colonialist. Formal usage was introduced by academics in the early 1970 s notably by historian Yuji Ichioka, who is credited with popularising the term. Today, Asian American is the accepted term for most formal purposes, such as government and academic research, although it is often shortened to Asian in common usage.

The challenges around defining Asian American Literature are not unique and it indicates the issues of race, culture and national identity that are endemic to United States history and culture. The world's best Chinese American author Amy Tan's fiction reads the stifling shift of three generational economic existence of the Chinese in their homeland China and their new abode America. Most of the writers are of the view that one's homeland is a paradise to one. The new land would never become a paradise to a displaced person. Amy Tan points out that a person should learn to live amidst new situations to accommodate themselves in the country of adaption. She highlights the necessity for abandoning the fixed and stereotyped notions of the 'self,

home nation and nationality'. She offers solutions to meet the unpleasant situations in a host country and shows the ways to adapt to the new trends and ever new surroundings.

Post colonial theorists analysed the problems that arise due to mass migration as people are always on the move for various reasons in the post- modern world. The mass mobility results in losing one's native culture owing to dislocation. In the era of globalisation movements and sudden jerks have become part of one's life. It includes social, cultural and psychological shifts. The migrated people wander with twin identities, twin cultures and twin mind – sets in search of their new destinies. As Charu Sharma aptly says in his *Mapping Migration*, "old symbioticties give way to new attitudes as one changes location" (xv). Upendra Nanavati in one of his articles states as "tight rope walking and balancing between two cultures as the victims" (xvii).

Rose Marie Perez Foster explains in his writing as immigration is Trauma. This paves a way to the new significant and potential for 'traumatogenic' experiences that may lead to serious psychological distress, Thomas tweed *Crossing and Dwelling : A Theory of Religion* creates a typology of three modes of religious mapping of the world which fix Amy Tan's portrayal of migrational transmutation . According to Tweed migrational transmutation has three types. The first is 'Locative' or 'position', that emphasises a person belonging to a place which is associated with the origin and considered it a sacred place. The second type is 'supra-locative' or 'movement' which focuses on transcending space rather than being located in any one place. The third type 'trans locative' helps the immigrant to move back and forth in history and geography, constantly mediating between their homeland and their adopted land.

Most of the immigrants who left their country since the 16th century chose to settle in the United States, because the United States is considered to be the land of democracy. It became the multicultural land, possesses proper justice for all and the responses given to the immigrant in the new land colours their life and moulds them to gain new experience too. Sometimes people try to leave their country of origin. In the twentieth century, mass migration happened in search of a new identity, livelihood and somewhere to escape from their current situation.

Amy Tan, Chinese – American writer brings out her personal experience in her novel *The Hundred Secret Senses*. In 1945, China wins the war, and pushes the Japanese imperialists out forever. During the war, Jack Yee is a university student. He is married and has a child named Kwan. He promises his wife that he will send her money for her livelihood. As a blessing in disguise, he goes to America holding some other person's document. He tells his wife to go and live with her sister Li Bin-bin in Changmian and wait. "Once I'm in America, I will send for you and our daughter, I promise" (180). He leaves his wife who is about to have another baby and Kwan becomes helpless.

When the nationalists and communists are fighting over China in 1948, Kwan's father disguises himself with an adopted name 'Jack Yee' from the papers which he has got from a drunkard says, "During civil war, papers like these were worth many men's lives and fortunes...I can change my fate" (180). He knows that the war will make them fall from their line and throw them to despair in no time. With a heavy heart, he leaves for America to start his life a new and forgets about the past that he leaves behind. His jiffy plan helps him to go to America to attain peace. In 1949, the communists take over China and it is impossible for Yee to return to his five- year –old daughter Kwan because no more planes or boats can leave or enter China. Yee is "eager to be rid of his past, in a hurry to start his new life" (THSS 180) and he starts a new life with a new wife in America.

Changing the name while immigrating from one place to another is quite common in an immigrant's life and it is their stride to show that they are becoming anew. Talking about the dilemma in her own name Jhumpa Lahiri says in her interview with Jeffrey brown

It's what my world is, and I've always been aware of my (Gogol) parents came from Calcutta. I have found myself sort of caught between the world of left behind and still clung to, and also the world that surrounded me at school and everywhere else, as soon as I set good out of the door (28)

This correlates a smooth transcend with the sense of emotive feeling of Amy Tan as well. On the one hand, change of name symbolizes a new identity to them in their new world leaving the past behind. But on the other hand, it indicates their superficial living conditions in the new environment. Their inner life still retains their eternal identity, China.

Amy Tan beautifully portrays the conflict between the Chinese ancestors and the young Chinese-American daughter. Kwan's voice and presence is that of the ancestral mother. Jack started a new life in America and was happy with his profession, married Kensfield and had three children; Olivia, Kevin and Tommy. He never talked about his Chinese life, but that does not mean that he was not haunted by the past. He was haunted and thus he relieved his grieving heart at his death bed to the shock of Kensfield. Though it was a shock for the modern American family to ever even think about another family in China Kensfield decided to identify Kwan and bring her to U.S. and thought of sponsoring Kwan, as a foreign exchange student for a year and try to give her later a wonderful American life. That is how the Chinese in Kwan started mixing up with the American in Olivia; initially Olivia was not happy to welcome her half-sister, who would be an addition to share the meager souvenir of her mother's love.

Olivia's mother is busy and had no time to spend with Olivia, in which a new comer is now to split the share. But the busy mother finds solace on making Kwan as Olivia's caretaker. Olivia feels grateful for her service, but at the same time she also resents her for having taken her mother's place. She becomes hysteric and screams, "She is not my sister! I hate her! I wish she'd go back to China (12).

Kwan instigated Olivia to learn Chinese through her non-stop Chinese talk all through night at the common bedroom they shared. She influenced her not only with the Chinese language but also with the Chinese thoughts and secrets which changed her to look at the world in a different way. Olivia disowned her many times and never helped Kwan with her English though she used to earnestly request her. Both of them grew up with their differences and after many years, Kwan seems to be the same without any change in her life style.

Tan's plot abound in superstitious beliefs. Most of the older generation of women who had migrated from China swore allegiance to superstition. Kwan teaches Olivia to sing Chinese nursery songs. At night in the twin bed, Kwan keeps on talking how her life was touched by hardships and personal tragedy. Everything is conveyed to Olivia in their secret language, Chinese. Chinese is said to be the secret language between Kwan and Olivia. She remarks, "Kwan infected me with it (Chinese language)" (13). Though from childhood Kwan teaches Olivia the Chinese language and Olivia teaches English to Kwan, the only change in Kwan's English over the last thirty years is in the speed with which she talks. "She thinks her English is great. She often corrects her husband, George. "Not stealed," she will tell him "stolened" (23). But the real fact is she could not even call her sister's name correctly. When Kwan was eighteen years old she introduces more ghostly secrets seen through her "yin eyes" (3) to her sister. Kwan promises her sister "It's true. I have yin eyes. I can see yin people" (15). Unfortunately, Kwan's Chinese stories backfired and she is diagnosed of a serious mental disorder, and is given electro shock treatments. Olivia worries that she cannot lead a happy life when Simon is in Elza's anamnesis. Olivia asks Kwan to have a talk with Elza ghost, Kwan says that she will be comfortable if it is a Chinese ghost. But Olivia replies that it is a polish ghost. Having yin eyes, Kwan talks about the life after death. She says "The next is segregated? you can go to the world of yin only if you're Chinese" (110).

Olivia asks her sister's help to rescue Simon from this unhealthy obsession, thus paving to be mixed with Kwan's culture. Kwan, uses her husband's secret senses, the hidden instinct and made Simon to come out of that Elza's thought. Olivia is glad, Simon forgets Elza and she says that Elza wishes him to marry Olivia but Olivia felt Elza speaking, "Simon don't forget me. Wait for me. I'm coming back" (107). She ignores the hallucination in the bliss of marrying Simon.

They lived happily and after sixteen years of joyful life they planned to get divorce due to, misunderstanding Kwan is determined that they should not be divorced. The Chinese mind try to protect love, whereas American mind always leads to another way and made a conclusion about Simon's love, which was totally different from Kwan's opinion. This cause trouble between Kwan and Olivia. If she had listened to her sister, she would not have lost her sister in the cave and suffer throughout with the guilt. Kwan insists that to go on a trip to China hoping that the trip to China would save the hostility between Simon and Olivia.

Amy Tan shows explicitly that, though her characters are assimilated in America and almost blends with the mainstream in many ways, it is only their homeland that provides salvation for the oppressed heart. She gives a balanced detail about both the countries, their positive aspects and negative aspects. It is true that the immigrants enjoyed better life in the migrated country, but at the same time the inner peace can only be provided in the motherland.

Olivia and Simon are not interested to go along with each other but Kwan insists them that they can still come to China as friends. When Olivia was thinking about the name she shall have after divorcing Simon, she realised that her identity was not a standard one. "I realise I've never had any sort of identity that suited me, not since I was five at least, when our mother changed our last name to Laguni" (156).

From Laguni she had come to be known as Olivia lee than to Olivia Bishop. "She was a model for multiple personalities" (157). She thought she was suffering from multiple identities. She planned to change her name as to Yee, which relates to her father's name. Kwan discloses the secret and warns her not to go by any wrong name because Yee was not their father's real name, it was stolen from American drunken robber. Both of them set on a pace to search for their father's original opportunity to go to China, because many people in Changmian might still remember their father's name. Once the name is found; "You and me, the two of us, we can change our father's name back o its true one. Together we can send him at last to the world of yin" (163)

Kwan is very happy in going back o her country where she lived until she was eighteen years old. She would see her Bigma and reunite with her schoolmates. Most of her schoolmates have not survived the Cultural Revolution, she was lucky to be in America alive with a family for herself and having a decent life. Her life in America was comparatively happy. This was possible only because of migration.

Life in America is also not very easy. Hoping for a better life in America, everyone aspires to immigrate. It is a pre- requisite to equip them to suit the country's environment. Kwan did not refine her English even after living nearly for thirty years in America still she could not differentiate between 'apparent' 'parent' and 'stink'. Consequently she suffers with the problem of language. As the Chinese find difficulties in coping with America, so does Olivia struggle to cope with the Chinese life style.

In China Olivia finds a lot of differences between America and Chinese life style. On the very first day Kwan instructs her not to sleep beyond five in the morning. "This is China. Everyone else is up. Only you're asleep"(186). She further instructs "your American idea doesn't work here." Kwan goes on "In china you always responsible for someone else, no matter what" (199). Law was practised china. Olivia's American way of logical reasoning suddenly disappears, when she loses Simon in the cave.

In the process of rescuing Simon, Kwan loses her life; through her help again they were reunited. However American Olivia is, the Chinese in her has been in her blood which made her to think about her sisters preaching about the hundred secret senses. She had learnt the reality of life from Kwan:

The world is not a place but the vastness of soul.
And the soul is nothing more than love, limitless,
Endless, all that moves us toward knowing what is true.
I once thought love was supposed to be nothing but bliss.
If people we love die, then they are lost only to our ordinary sense. (358)

Having taken the memory of the country of their origin to the host country, these immigrants get accustomed to the new environment, even though it is their new destiny in their life after facing the harsh realities during the war in China. But on the other hand their sense of belonging is still in oscillation, placing their foot firm in the new land, psychologically, their thoughts and mindset oscillate to and from the country of origin and the place they have adopted .But their next generations fulfil their dreams by visiting the country of origin. Some of Tan's characters witnessed their origin China as a transformed modernised China and pointed out as 'Americanized China'.

In fact, towards the end every character in Tan's fiction realizes that they do not want to leave their heritage behind as Lahiri resolves in one of her fiction *The Namesake*, "Things that should never have happened, that seemed out of place and wrong, these were what prevailed, what endured, in the end" (287) Bridging the gap between the native land and the adopted land, the individual and society, from various cultural upheavals, the diasporas spread liberation in the modern era. Cohen rightly portrays.

Moreover, the sense of uprootedness, disconnection, loss and estrangement, which the traditionally-recognized Diasporas hitherto morally appropriated, may now signify something more general about the human condition. Why not celebrate the creative, enriching side of living in 'Babylon', the radiance of difference? (174).

Tan accomplishes the real and unreal as the prime focus in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, where Olivia towards the end finds herself believing that “truth lies not in logic, but in hope”(398). This novel links both time and space. It bridges the two continents through the experiences of the mothers and the daughters culture and ethnic identity are possible to the daughters only they can fully understand and identify themselves with their mother through the various stages in attaining womanhood. The cultural experiences are shared between the mothers and the daughters from isolated monologues into meaningful dialogues. Tan has successfully brought for the shifting up of the character from China to the United States again back to China. Generally setting includes geographic location in which the story takes place and the historical moment in time of imperial China, about ancient Chin and Qing dynasties.

The women's vulnerability finds assurances of security which allow its setting of 'real' character or 'natural' character in the cross – cultural relations which has been liberated from its 'fictitious' overlay

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