

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 10 : 6 June 2010

ISSN 1930-2940

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Conquering Psychological Alienation How Amy Tan Looks at It

Sushil Mary Mathews, Ph.D.

The Concept of Object Relation

Sigmund Freud developed the concept 'Object Relation' to emphasise that bodily drives are satisfied through a medium, an object, on a specific locus. Melanie Klein elaborated on and extended Freud's original theory through her unique insights. Klein felt that the object that one connected to can be either part-objects or whole-objects.

Klein was an Austrian psychotherapist, who was an early pioneer in the use of psychoanalysis with children. The Kleins had moved to Budapest in 1910, and it was there that she first encountered the work of Sigmund Freud. That proved a turning point in her life and she dedicated herself to studying and practicing psychoanalysis. After the birth of her third child in 1914, she became especially interested in studying children.

Klein met Freud in person in 1917, and wrote her first paper entitled "The Development of a Child," in 1919. Klein however got into a conflict with Freud when she laid out her theory that fears and aggression were vital forces in the psychological development of a child. Freud believed that sexual force was the important factor that controlled the psyche. His daughter Anna Freud followed the footsteps of her father and

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later concentrated on the psychoanalysis of children. The controversy led to a split between the Freudian and Kleinian groups of psychoanalysts.

Defining Life: An Anomaly Drawn Towards Inorganic State

Phyllis Grosskurth in his book, Melanie Klein: Her world and her work (1995) describes the ideologies that Klein developed. Klein centered her work on the hypothesis proposed by Sigmund Freud, namely that life is an anomaly—that it is drawn towards an inorganic state, and contains an instinct to die. In psychological terms, ‘Eros’, the sustaining and uniting principle of life, also referred to as libido, is postulated to have a counterpart, Thanatos, or the ‘death instinct,’ which seeks to terminate and disintegrate life.

Klein examined the aggressive fantasies of hate, envy, and greed in very young children and learnt that the human psyche oscillated between Eros and Thanatos. The psychological state corresponding to Thanatos, she called the ‘paranoid-schizoid’ position, and the psyche dominated by Eros she called the ‘depressive’ position.

Object Relations Theory

The ‘Object Relations Theory’ was developed by Sigmund Freud, W.R.D. Fairbairn, and Melanie Klein. This theory states that the self exists only in relation to other ‘objects,’ which may be external or internal. The internal objects refer to the internalised versions of external objects, formed basically from early interactions with parents. It meant that the child regarded the caregiver as the first object of desire and satisfied his or her needs through that object. According to the object relations theory, there are three fundamental mental representations between the self and the other: attachment, frustration, and rejection. These representations are universal emotional states, and are the major building blocks of personality.

The central thesis in Melanie Klein's Object Relations theory was that the objects can be either part-object or whole-object, i.e. a single organ (such as a mother's breast) or a whole person (the mother). Either the mother or just the mother's breast can be the locus of satisfaction for a drive. Depending on the nature of the relationship between child and caregiver, the child can develop various disturbances, such as an excessive preoccupation with certain body parts or preoccupation with parts versus a whole person. According to Klein's theory, a situation in which a child does not receive sufficient nurturing care increases the likelihood that the child will retreat into a make-believe world filled with imaginary objects, generated in an attempt to satisfy the need for real objects (New World Encyclopedia).

Infant-Parent Relationship

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Research in developmental psychology has supported the thesis that the formation of the mental world is enabled by the infant-parent interpersonal interaction failing which the child in later life becomes paranoid-schizoid or depressive. This is also related to the Attachment theory, originating in the work of John Bowlby, that considers children to have a need for a secure relationship with adult caregivers, without which normal social and emotional development will not occur.

An extreme deficit in appropriate parenting can lead to a lack of attachment behaviours in a child and may result in the rare disorder known as 'reactive attachment disorder'. The difficulty faced by the affected children involves either indiscriminate and excessive attempts to receive comfort and affection from any available adult, or extreme reluctance to initiate or accept comfort and affection, even from familiar adults, especially when distressed. All this is usually set right through psychotherapy.

The Focus of This Study: Novels of Amy Tan in the Background of Object Relations Theory

This paper seeks to study the novels of Tan against the 'Object Relation theory', and the 'Attachment theory' and examine how the mothers in Tan's novels help set right the alienation experienced by the daughters. Tan proves that a strong mother can restore the estrangements experienced by the daughters and help to guide the daughters to the intensity that life offers. This article aims at studying the ability of women to deal with the psychological issues and find solutions within themselves or through the support of other women. The daughters are encouraged to return to their objects of love and this leads them to liberty and peace.

Tan's novels can be laid against this theory because her novels deal intensely with the mother daughter relationships. The daughters face psychological problems as they grow up and ironically it is the mother herself or a mother figure that sets her free in the end.

Amy Tan's Infancy

The Object Relations theory sets out three mental representations between the child and the object and this chapter will examine these problems in the characters as children and as young adults and the therapy that Tan offers, the formidable presence and guidance of the mothers, that saves and leads the daughters onto the path of self realisation and peace.

Tan had a difficult childhood and especially remembered the traumatic period of her life when she lost her brother and father to brain tumour, in a span of a year. The

family then began a haphazard journey through Europe, before settling in Montreux, Switzerland. She had another traumatic experience when one of her closest friends was murdered. This forced Tan to give up her doctoral program and she had to go into psychiatric therapy for being a workaholic in 1985. But this treatment did not work and she quit therapy after the psychiatrist fell asleep for the third time during the sessions. Later it was her mother Daisy who helped Tan regain her confidence and experience life abundantly.

When one relates the life of the author Tan to the Object Relation theory, it is evident that Tan's difficult infancy and childhood had hindered her from facing life as other normal children would have. Paul Gray in "The Joys and Sorrows of Amy Tan" shows how she had reacted on the day The Joy Luck Club was screened.

My mother was there; she was proud. Everything should have been the formula for somebody being extremely happy. But I cried all day. I felt suicidal. I wanted to jump off the roof. And I said, 'This is not normal. Logically, this does not make sense. Why would I feel this way?' The answer, Tan learned, was depression. 'Whatever it is that causes it,' she says, "I think it's just always going to be there. Part of it is having had a suicidal mother and maybe the things that have happened in my life." She reluctantly began taking antidepressants: 'Like a lot of people, I had a resistance, thinking that emotional or mental problems are things that you can deal with other than through medication. I also didn't want anything to affect me mentally. But what a difference! And I thought, 'Boy, what a different childhood I might have had had my mother taken antidepressants'. (72)

Children in Amy Tan's Novels

Children, as portrayed by Tan in her novels, are made weak or strong by the impressions created in the early years of their life and these make a definite mark on their character and are difficult to change. In Tan's novel The Joy Luck Club there are two daughters who display attachment, frustration and rejection and the other two who are filled with fear and remain unsure in life. The young girls are revealed to the readers not when they are babies but as young girls who rebel against the mother and her ideologies. These are children born in America of Chinese parents who have migrated in the recent past. Jing mei Woo began her narration speaking of her mother Suyuan, who believed that one could be anything one wanted to be in America and Suyuan was obsessed with the hope that her daughter would become a prodigy.

At first she wanted Jing to become the Chinese Shirley Temple. Later she wished she would be like other remarkable children who knew the capitals of all the countries, or

were good in mathematics or had exemplary memory. Jing was as excited as her mother in the beginning but soon she got disappointed and wanted to rebel against her. She thought “I won’t let her change me, I promised myself. I won’t be what I’m not”(JLC134). Suyuan Woo however showed no signs of giving up.

Once she saw a nine year old Chinese girl playing the piano on ‘The Ed Sullivan Show’ and in a couple of days her mother had traded house cleaning services for her classes with Mr.Chong, a retired piano teacher. Jing Mei tried fighting but to no avail. Suyuan Woo arranged for Jing to participate in a talent show held in the church hall. All the other friends of Suyuan Woo were there and Jing put up an awful show and this devastated her mother. Jing waited for her to get angry and blame her, but she simply wore “a quite, blank look that said she had lost everything” (JLC 140). But she would not give up even then. She wanted Jing to practise as usual but Jing strongly opposed the idea. She knew how to weaken her mother and used the right strategy. She said that she hoped she had been dead like the babies her mother had lost in China. It was then that her mother was weakened, “. . .her face went blank, her mouth closed, her arms went slack and she backed out of the room, stunned, as if she were blowing away like a small brown leaf, thin, brittle, lifeless”(JLC142). Jing mei decided not to follow her mother’s decrees.

Detachment from Mother – The Difficult Process of Alienation

Jing had detached herself from her mother and felt she could grow up independently. Her mother had the American dream in her and she wished that her daughter would become the best, but when the mother compelled her into this, Jing moved away and alienated herself from her mother just as the Object Relation theory suggests there is at first attachment and then frustration. This led her into the next step of rejecting her mother and fending for herself. Melanie Klein has through her work proved how such children face difficulties in their lives in the future and Jing Mei also had difficulty, in her work and in her relationships.

Jing Mei Woo grew up and was given the piano on her thirtieth birthday. It was only then that she tried playing the song she had played at the concert many years ago. The piece was called ‘Pleading Child’ and she could play it with ease. She discovered that there was a lighter melody on the facing page which was titled ‘Perfectly Contented’. She realised that they were the two halves of the same song.

It was only later after her mother had died that she really got to know her mother, from her mother’s friends, from her father and from the relationships she had maintained. She embarked on a tour to China, confident that she could meet her sisters and tell them all about the mother whom they did not have the privilege of being with.

Jing had dreaded going to China, as she thought she would only lose herself there, but she could fully understand and recognise herself only in China. She recognised that her mother had loved her a lot especially as she learnt more of the Chinese language and the significance of her name. Her mother had found her valuable and credited her much above the other children of the members of the Joy Luck Club though she did not explicitly mention it. The love of her mother led her to a personal understanding and made her feel whole again.

The Story of Waverly Jong

Waverly Jong was just six when her mother taught her the art of invisible strength. She told her “wise guy, he not go against wind”(JLC 89). Waverly remembered how her mother had taught them daily truths so that the children could rise above their circumstances.

One Christmas, Vincent, her brother received a chess set from the missionary ladies. Waverly often watched her brothers playing and soon learnt all the rules of the game. She met a man called Lau Po, and when he saw her interest in chess, taught her new secrets and chess etiquette. Waverly was soon ready to play her first local tournament. Her mother gave her a small tablet of red jade for good fortune. She won the tournament and many victories followed. She became the national chess champion when she was nine. She was given a lot of concessions at home to enable her to practise more.

She was, however, never excused from accompanying her mother to market on Saturdays. Her mother loved to tell anyone who looked her way, that this was her daughter Waverly Jong. Waverly was irritated by this and she retaliated, telling her that she was embarrassed by the way she spoke of her. She also told her that if she wanted to show off she could learn how to play chess herself. She shouted thus and ran away and returned home late that night.

Her mother did not speak to her; she acted as if she had become invisible. Waverly did not want to appear weak so she ignored her. She thought she could stop playing chess. She tried gaining a reaction from her mother by watching television instead of practicing and she decided to sacrifice a tournament. The tournament was over but nobody bothered. “I realized my mother knew more tricks than I had thought”(JLC 171).

Waverly thought that she would make the first move and pretend that her mother had won. She told her mother that she would start playing again, but her mother would not hear of it, she told her that she could not quit and then start playing as and when she liked. Waverly was very upset but she soon won back her mother. She developed a fever and her mother forgot all differences and cared for her tenderly. But after that, she sensed

that her mother had changed. “It was as if she had erected an invisible wall and I was secretly groping each day to see how high and how wide it was” (JLC172). Waverly lost her talent in chess and what she had gained was an alienation from her mother.

Waverly Jong eloped and married Marvin Chen when she was eighteen. She had admired him because she felt he was nearly perfect. But her mother felt otherwise and by the time she had her say about Marvin, Waverly’s feelings for him, “went from disappointment to contempt to apathetic boredom” (JLC174). She later felt that it was her mother who had poisoned her marriage. She was therefore determined never to let it happen again. When she fell in love with Rich Schields, she was frightened of her mother and tried her best to save herself and to protect Rich. She could never bring herself to tell her mother directly that she loved him and that she wanted to marry him. She however made up her mind and went to her mother who was fast asleep and for a moment Waverly thought that her mother was dead and grew terrified. Her mother woke up and pacified her and told her that she had known all along that her daughter wanted to marry Rich and that she was also happy at the proposal, but did not know how to explicitly tell her.

Waverly was very happy and it was a very significant moment when her mother also told her of her rich ancestry and heritage. Her mother had restored in her, faith and strength. She blessed her daughter with a strong character that would help her face life boldly. Earlier the attachment had moved to frustration on the part of Waverly who felt that her mother should not be allowed to gloat over her success. When Waverly rejected her mother, she embarked on problems, but she was saved from the difficulties of the future because her mother had not rejected her.

The Story of Rose Hsu – The Basic Attachment

Rose Hsu Jordan as a child admired her mother An-mei Hsu and was very amiable. This is the basic attachment that the “Object Relation Theory” speaks of and it is only when this is disturbed problems do begin and trouble the lives of those involved. As a child she listened to the stories that her mother told her. She told her that it was important that she listened to her because her mother warned her “...my ear would bend too easily to other people, all saying words that had no lasting meaning, because they came from the bottom of their hearts, where their own desires lived, a place where I could not belong” (JLC 185). All the advice and strict conditions however pushed Rose into frustration. She liked the free society that she saw abroad and rejected her mother and her small world.

Klein had rightly laid out her theory that, when there is a break in the object that one relates to in childhood, the individual will have relational problems or become paranoid schizoid. This is seen in the later years of the character Rose. She had fallen in

love with Ted who was a medical student. Ted's parents were not for the marriage as she was considered a hindrance to his future. Rose's mother also did not want her to marry a foreigner. But it was these problems that brought them closer and they were married. Ted always obtained her opinions on various issues and she revealed her views but it always ended with Ted deciding what he had wanted, and so after a while she just let him decide all matters. He soon mistook it for indifference and was angry because he felt that she was taking no responsibility in any matter.

In Adversity

The problem started in a grave manner after adversity struck his profession. Ted had performed a cosmetic surgery on a lady and it was not successful and he was sued. This troubled him and any provocation from the part of Rose met with a strong vent of anger. Ted soon issued her papers for their divorce. Rose underwent therapy and told the psychiatrist her terrible thoughts of revenge; she told him how she wanted to fix him at a famous restaurant with a voodoo doll. But the psychiatrist appeared bored and disinterested. Rose later told her friends different stories:

To my friend Waverly, I said I never knew how much I loved Ted until I saw how much he could hurt me. I felt such pain, literally a physical pain, as if someone had torn off both my arms without anesthesia, without sewing me back up...

To my friend Lena, I said I was better off without Ted. After the initial shock, I realized I didn't miss him at all. I just missed the way I felt when I was with him.(JLC189)

The friends and the psychiatrist could not help her much, it was she who had to take a stand and fight her marriage. She tried taking a few sleeping pills but it did not work. Later it was her mother who gave her the necessary strength she needed. She had been the one who had fought the marriage in the beginning, but now she wanted her daughter to fight for it. She told her to stand up and speak for herself, Rose realised that it was time she spoke for herself and told Ted that she would neither move out nor sign the papers as he had wanted. She decided to fight, more for herself than for her marriage or the relationship. In this case too, it was not psychiatric intervention that helped but the object that she was reconnected to, or the mother who helped her face her problems, fight for her marriage and win what she wanted.

Growing Up in an Atmosphere of Fear

In Tan's [The Kitchen God's Wife](#) the American born daughter grew up in an atmosphere of fear. Pearl grew up in a home where her mother Winnie seemed to have all

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the answers. It was on the day of the funeral of her father that Pearl's frustration with her mother turned to rejection. She could not bring herself to mourn and her mother had dealt badly with her for this, and Pearl just walked away from the funeral. The mother-daughter relationship did not completely die down, they just tolerated each other. Pearl, as a young woman had to battle with a crippling disease and not with a bad marriage. Weili her mother felt happy when she heard that her daughter Pearl was marrying a doctor, but when she came to know that Phil was a pathologist she became furious. Pearl and Phil however, led a happy life with their daughters, Tessa and Cleo.

After the birth of her first daughter Pearl was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and Pearl had not told her mother about the disease. Her friend Mary who knew this had revealed this to her mother Helen who happened to be the friend of Pearl's mother. So Pearl was always worried if her mother would come to know the truth. Pearl meant to tell her mother but every time she began, her mother had some other more important story to tell her. Pearl shut herself off when she most needed her mother. She felt it right to stay alienated and rejected any approach on the part of the mother.

Setting Right the Alienation

This alienation was set right when Pearl's mother lent her hand of love and succour. It was a time of reminiscence when Winnie revealed the truth of her past, thereby revealing to Pearl her true identity. Pearl learnt that she was the daughter of the cruel Wen Fu and together they had blamed him for every bad thing that had occurred in their lives. She told her mother about the sickness and her mother's reaction was absolutely different from what she had ever expected:

I had imagined all this, and I was wrong. It was worse. She was the furies unbound...

I was going to protest, to tell her that she was working herself to a frenzy for nothing. But all of a sudden I realized: I didn't want her to stop. I was relieved in a strange way. Or perhaps relief was not the feeling. Because the pain was still there. She was tearing it away-my protective shell, my anger, my deepest fears, my despair. She was putting all this into her own heart, so that I could finally see what was left. Hope. (KGW 401-2)

Attachment Theory versus Object Relations Theory

Attachment theorists, agree with the Object Relation theorists and emphasise the need for children to have a secure relationship with adult caregivers without which normal social and emotional development will not be possible. It is a crucial ingredient for the right development and when there is a separation from the object, life turns

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difficult and it is when the characters are able to relate back to the object that they understand the fullness of life. But the matriarchs did not count the break in the relationship as a hindrance, they were able to rescue their daughters from despair and give them a new lease of life. The renewed relationship brought healing and peace in the lives of both the mother and the daughter.

Consequence of Early Disappointment, Fear and Loneliness

Olivia, the American born daughter in Tan's Hundred Secret Senses, was forlorn and lacked the love of the mother and she did not like a replacement in the form of a sister and so Olivia grew up as a lonely child. Her mother never seemed to have time for her and even as a child, she felt the wounds of great disappointment, fear and loneliness was what Olivia grew up with. But from the beginning there was her half sister, Kwan, who took on the role of her mother. She cared for the children, packed their lunches, braided Olivia's hair and looked after them when they were at risk. Olivia was however embarrassed to be with her because she asked dumb questions and all the other children made fun of her. Through the years Olivia felt:

She's like an orphan cat, kneading on my heart. She's been this way all my life, peeling me oranges, buying me candy, admiring my report cards and telling me how smart I was, smarter than she could ever be. Yet I've done nothing to endear myself to her. As a child, I often refused to play with her. Over the years, I've yelled at her, told her she embarrassed me. I can't remember how many times I've lied to get out of seeing her.

Mean while, she has *always* interpreted my out bursts as helpful advice, my feeble excuses as good intentions, my pallid gestures of affection as loyal sisterhood. And when I can't bear it any longer, I lash out and tell her she's crazy. Before I can retract the sharp words, she pats my arm, smiles and laughs. And the wound she bears heals itself instantly. Whereas I feel guilty forever. (HSS 23)

Seeking Help

Olivia had lost the object of love that she had, her mother, and she unknowingly connected to Kwan, though she was not ready to accept her completely. Kwan helped her in every way rendering physical help like doing her dishes, washing her clothes, and stocking her refrigerator with food. The psychological help she rendered was invaluable, she was always there to listen whenever Olivia wanted her and it was Kwan who helped her with the major decisions in life. But Olivia always kept Kwan at a distance and never allowed her to come into her life. She was frustrated with her mother and then in turn she did not want to accept the love offered by Kwan.

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The power that Kwan possessed, the yin eyes, was able to draw Olivia closer to her at times. Kwan seemed to have led Olivia in the previous life and was ever willing to help her in the present and unite her to her true love, which she believed was the fulfillment of a vow she had earlier made. Olivia, though at times detested the aid rendered was grateful for the guidance of her sister. It was because of the persistence of Kwan, that Olivia embarked on a journey to China along with her husband Simon, although the couple was on the verge of divorce.

Sense of Guilt

Olivia had fallen in love with Simon when they studied at college together. She had learnt that Simon had loved Elsie Marie Vandervort and that he carried the guilt of her death. Olivia in order to please him began their relationship by often referring to her and living according to how Elza might have wanted to. Soon, however, she grew tired of this charade and it was then that Olivia sought the help of her sister Kwan who had the power of conversing with the yin people and they arranged for a meeting of Simon with Elza, when Kwan translated that Elza assured him that he was at no fault and that she wanted him to lead a normal life without her memory intruding into it always.

This helped Olivia and Simon get on together but Olivia felt that their relationship was very fragile and that she still lived in the shadow of the ghost Elza and so she wished to end the same. She was intimidated when she saw that Simon still had her memory as an integral part and that he had started writing a memoir of Elza. Olivia felt that her life had become routine and offered no sense of companionship that she hoped for. She tried to work out an answer by talking to Simon and he too had made an effort but it was not enough.

Mother's Help

Like the other mothers Tan creates, Kwan worked hard to help Olivia with her life. When there was an opportunity for the couple to travel to China, she helped them decide to take the trip. She was the one who accompanied them to China and helped Olivia recall and relive the past with her. It was in a sense Kwan who sacrificed her life to unite Olivia and Simon. She helped them with a renewed commitment and Olivia believed it was Kwan who after her death blessed them with a daughter in spite of the fact that the doctors had declared that Simon was sterile.

After Kwan went missing in the caves the couple was blessed with a daughter and Olivia believed that it was Kwan who had returned in the form of a daughter. Kwan had led Olivia into a new life of love and happiness. Object Relation Theory states that when there is a break in the attachment in the object created by a child, the child does not grow

well and there are problems faced by the child in life and relationships, but this had been bridged quickly by Kwan who came into the life of Olivia, but it was only when Olivia was able to accept her, that there was a bonding and a healing, that led to a setting right of relationships.

Mothers and Daughters

Tan's next novel The Bonesetter's Daughter is a saga of the lives of the mothers and daughters. Ruth, the American born daughter of LuLing grew up listening to the frightening tales of the curses and the past. She tried to stop her mother from telling her all this. But LuLing took complete control of her daughter and seemed to correct and criticise her at every juncture publicly. The place made no difference to the Chinese mother, the culture and heritage had to be protected. Ruth, who had been born and brought up in America, felt otherwise. She could not accept the hard and disciplined life meted out to her especially because she saw the different life style of the people around. As she grew up she felt it necessary to defy her mother and adamantly refused to give in to all her rules.

As she grew older, Ruth moved in with Art after his first marriage with Miriam had broken down. Art's parents considered Ruth to be the prime reason for the separation of the couple and they still admired Miriam and made no secret of it. The children of Art also loved their father and grandparents and preferred them to Ruth although she did her best for them. Art and Ruth had never married and at times Ruth felt that her life was not alright. She felt that Art was taking her for granted and the children never tried to even show her that they loved her. She felt that she needed some space and time to herself. As a child she had been frustrated with her mother and rejected her completely. As she grew into a young woman she wished to reconnect with her mother but she felt that it was too late as her mother had been diagnosed with dementia.

The mother, LuLing, wanted to share her life with her daughter and establish an understanding and so she had written down the details of her life before she became a prey to mental degradation and Ruth had an opportunity to look into the life of her mother. She understood that she had been a strong person who had had to bear the brunt of life in the form of a terrifying childhood in a home where no one loved her, and then at an orphanage where she found true love for a brief time. After the death of her husband, she had to leave the orphanage and live in the city waiting for a chance to migrate into the United States. LuLing the mother tried to give Ruth the best in America, though always tempered with the rich tradition and culture of China. Although she suffered from dementia in her later life she saved her and rendered strength to her through the chronicle of her life that she had given her. She had been good at calligraphy and the art of writing and she used this to connect to her daughter and bring her into a new understanding of life by which she would get a fuller and a happier life.

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Connecting – Failure of Psychotherapy

Melanie Klein and John Bowlby in their theories have spoken of the object that the child connects to in the very early stages of life. The novels of Tan reveal the daughters who were born in American, and were all frustrated with the mother who they felt dominated and cast a shadow over their life. They were unable to face life victoriously and all had problems in their relationships and a few of them also opted for therapy.

But psychotherapy did not help, they are disillusioned by it and they were forced to return to their source and origin of strength that they had thrown away – the mother figure.

The mother in turn held no grudge; she was ever present and willing to lead the daughter in the path of truth and hope. The mother was the only therapy that offered solace and enduring contentment in life. The mothers helped the daughters who had almost all become mothers themselves, to see the genuine feeling that she had for her, which she claimed was twenty four carat pure, that would not even deter them from dying for the sake of the welfare of the child. The novels of Tan highlight this great relationship.

Learning to Save Oneself in Foreign Cultures

These are the lives of the American born daughters and their mothers. Tan is able to portray this great relationship of mother-daughter in the lives of the mothers who had migrated to America. Tan has detailed a few of their lives in detail, and this can be considered in the light of the object relation theory but here the women learn to save themselves. They are very strong, they have been bequeathed this strength by their mothers who lived and died, setting examples for them.

As young children in China they had a very close relationship with the mother but this was not for long. Lindo had a happy childhood with her parents but she had to leave for her husband's house when she was just twelve and then endured physical and mental torture, but she was able to escape this life and sought a new life in America. An-mei Hsu grew up in her uncle's house listening to the bad tales of her mother but she soon learnt that her mother was innocent. An-mei saw her mother giving up her life for the sake of her daughter and this endowed her with strength to meet life. Ying Ying was also blessed with a good mother who taught her values of life when she was very young and this enabled her to fight the bad marriage she went into and look forward to the new life in America.

Winnie in The Kitchen God's Wife had a mother who escaped a bad marriage and was believed to have joined the communists. Winnie was endowed with the same fighting spirit and she received indirect help from the communists that helped her escape her bad marriage. In The Bonesetter's Daughter, Precious Auntie had helped LuLing escape a bad marriage by giving up her life and this helped her find true love and she also learnt to face life in spite of the odds in life.

Saving Fish from Drowning is a novel where Tan has set a new theme and pattern but even there one can trace her first concern. Tan wrote this novel immediately after the death of her mother and she felt that she would not be there to tell her story. Tan says in an interview with Lisa Allerdice in "Voices from Beyond that Speaks Volumes", in The Sydney Morning Herald "When my mother died, I did think that maybe I wouldn't be writing about her any more. But then I heard her say, 'Well, I can still tell the story! I don't have to be your mother in it.' And I thought, OK, you can tell the story, you can be the narrator. So I made the narrator dead just like my mother was dead. I took her voice, and by voice I don't mean her broken English, but the way she looked at the world" (Feb 7, 2006). Bibi Chen the narrator of the novel had lost her mother when she was a baby and she carried the mark of this loss for life. Her father's first wife was the one who brought her up. She was called Sweet Ma by the children, Bibi and the brothers, though they detested her. "Whatever emotional deficits I had, they were due to her. My excesses, as I have already said, were from my mother" (SFFD 19). Sweet Ma told her how she would have been Bibi's father's only wife but for the fact that she was barren and she always insisted that it was she who forced her husband to take another wife. She told Bibi how her mother had been barely sixteen when she married him "as his breeding concubine" (SFFD 20). Sweet Ma said "...he said I was wife enough. But I insisted that a stallion must have mares, and mares produce broods, so he mustn't be a mule" (SFFD 24).

Sweet Ma used to berate Bibi's mother and threatened to let the rats chew up the children if they grew up like her. She felt that Bibi's mother had been brought up very badly and she did not know how to behave. Bibi lost her father and had to care for her difficult step mother. The influence of the stepmother had put her in a shadow but she emerged when she discovered her passion for art. Bibi put her in a home and cared for her in a respectable manner. She thought that she would not live long but Bibi realised that this was not to be and it was she who had to leave the portals of this world first. At the end of the novel Bibi remembered the last minutes of her life. It had been a very lucky day when she received a few relics of her mother, which her sister was able to get from the daughter of a man who had stolen it from their family. She was enamoured by a comb. "I rubbed my mother's haircomb against my cheek and pressed it near my heart. I rocked it as one might a baby. For the first time, I felt the emptiness of her loss replaced with the fullness of her love. I was about to burst with joy" (SFFD 472). And in the intensity of this joy she fell off a stool and died.

The Mothers of Tan's Novels

The mothers of Tan are capable of pulling their daughters away from the mire that they were entrapped in. The daughters though they failed to realise this, were nevertheless saved by their mothers who considered it their prime duty to steer their daughters into the right track and empower them with the rich mental stamina that they had brought down through the ages. The daughters were able to trace back to their objects of love that they had as infants and lead life efficiently with this new found source of love and confidence. The Joy Luck Club ends with Jing's reunion with her two sisters, which had been the ultimate dream of the founder of the club, Suyuan Woo. And when they met all differences disappeared and they conquered the psychological estrangement. "I know we all see it: Together we look like our mother. Her same eyes, her same mouth, open in surprise to see at last, her long cherished wish" (JLC 288).

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10 : 6 June 2010

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Sushil Mary Mathews, Ph.D.
Department of English
PSGR Krishnammal College for Women
Coimbatore -641004
Tamilnadu, India
sushilmary@gmail.com

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