

MOTHER DAUGHTER BOND IN AMY TAN'S *JOY LUCK CLUB*

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Abstract

Mother daughter bond is a long-lasting relationship. Conflicts and contradictions may prevail but an unseen strong chord of love and understanding holds them together. Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* reflects its author's memories of her mother and grandmother who have come across paths of bitterness and mental trauma. As the author herself has witnessed and experienced many of the incidents mentioned in *The Joy Luck Club*, she has efficiently woven the story with expressive words and comprehensible emotions. The author highlights that the bond between a mother and her daughter remains strong amidst linguistic and cultural barriers. The novel is evident to the notions of many critics that virtues and characteristics are passed on from one generation to another through parent child relationship and especially daughters are highly influenced by their mothers. Similar ideas are advocated by the attachment theory and psychoanalytical perspective of Oedipus complex and Electra complex.

Keywords: Mother daughter bond, attachment theory, psychoanalytical perspective of Oedipus complex and Electra complex.

Of late minority literature has come up in the world of conventional fiction in the United States. Most writers emerging from different ethnic minorities have been sharing their thoughts, culture and background with the general public. The changing ethnic atmosphere in the United States has created the possibility for the fiction writers who have originated from other countries and settled in America to be accepted along with the mainstream writers during the last decades.

Amy Tan, born in Oakland, California, is a famous Chinese American writer known for her novel *The Joy Luck Club*. Her amazing novel *The Joy Luck Club* unfolds the story of four Chinese mothers and their American daughters. Amy Tan's clear description of the mothers' and daughters' perspectives enables the readers to comprehend the sixteen interwoven stories and realise that the mother and daughter relationship is influenced by a

generation gap which is not merely created because of the age differences but also because of the cultural differences. The mother's perception of female identity is influenced by the Chinese culture whereas the views of the daughters though they have been raised in a double culture are much influenced by the American culture.

Mother daughter bond is always a cherishing and long-lasting bond. A daughter has no other person as trustworthy, understanding and comforting as a mother to share all her feelings and problems. Of course, there will be contradictions, conflicts and fights between them but still the bond is strong. Daughters mostly realise the value of their mothers after their wedding and understand their pains and sacrifices much better when they themselves become mothers. Some daughters are aware of the true nature of their mothers only after their death which is too late for them to reconcile with each other if necessary or to express their gratitude.

Myriad of research works state about mother and daughter bond. The relationship between mother and daughter is considered essential for many reasons. According to C.S.Shannon and S.M.Shaw mothers are the main care giver. Craig is of the opinion that mothers spend more time with their children more than fathers, regardless of their job status. Johnson says that mothers are often supposed to be liable for transferring values and preparing their children as functioning members of the society. Mothers are believed to be the most important models for their daughters says Chodorow, and daughters equate with their mothers more than with fathers says Starrels. The values and attitudes which are taught by mothers are internalized into daughters' value system, states Looker and Magee. Shannon and Shaw mention in their writings that children consider the information they collect from their parents and accept, refuse or improve these. The notions mentioned above of different writers are quite correct. If parents are judgemental and fault finding, then their children will be the same and if the parents are innocent and gentle, naturally they pass on the legacy of their virtues to their children too.

According to Rastogi psychoanalytic theory claims that a daughter's primary love object is her mother. J.O. Wisdom book unfolds that Helene Deutsch states that all phases of a daughter's development throughout her life are affected by her attachment to her mother. Moreover, Chodorow upholds that the Oedipus complex in the female child is a more confusing process because the girl experiences the conflict of both loving her primary love object and trying to identify with her while fearing castration and feeling envy and anger.

Rastogi is of the opinion that girls can never renounce and risk losing their love object completely and thus experience this uncertainty throughout their lives. Besides, Boyd says that this theory demands that daughters' unconscious accepting of maternal values and behaviours explains why daughters become like their mother. He also holds an idea that in psychoanalytic theories the focus is on what differentiates the mother daughter relationship from other pairs. Lerner elucidates that theories shape today's popular culture about the pathology of the person and that the end pointing in the mothers' direction. The mother is the environment of the child when a child is living more critical stages during their earlier years of development. The quality of the mother, what she is doing well or what is doing badly to her child, and how this behaviour affects a child was studied within psychodynamic theory, and it lasted without improvement. This supposition has caused the concentration on the mother child dyad and maternal power with a focus on how male and female children approach the process of differentiation in the family.

Every child whether boy or girl inherits the qualities of their parents but a daughter all the more reflects the nature of her mother. The writings of Bergman, Fahey, Sholomskas and Axelrod suggest that mothers' experiences and perceptions affect daughters' perspectives. The importance of a mother for a daughter is obvious. A woman experiences feelings of nourishment, tenderness, and security with her mother, says Dauglass. Bowlby opines that attachment styles to mothers or any caregivers predict the quality of future relationships. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Chodorow asserts that the process of the Oedipus complex or Electra complex for girls is more difficult and more confusing because a mother constitutes the primary object of love but also forms a rival as the first model for a daughter. If a daughter experiences a conflict between differentiation, developing self and the maintaining the attachment with her mother, the relationship between mother and daughter would be ambivalent. However, even this ambivalent relationship remains significant in a daughter's life, says Notman. Walters and Davie affirm that this relationship is believed to be a source of strength for a woman.

Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club*'s first section, "Feathers from a Thousand Miles Away," displays the stories of daughter Jing-mei and of the three mothers, An-Mei Hsu, Lindo Jong and Ying-Ying St. Clair. In Jing-mei's story, the reader comes to know that Suyuan Woo has passed away and that Jing-mei has been asked to replace her in the Joy Luck Club. Jing-mei also replaces her mother's space in the structure of the narrative, because she tells four stories, instead of two, thereby also telling the stories of her mother. The stories of the

mothers in this section, explain their childhood experiences in China and their relationship with their mothers. In the second section, “The Twenty-six Malignant Gates,” the daughters are the narrators of the stories. One after another, Waverly Jong, Lena St. Clair, Rose Hsu Jordan and Jing-Mei Woo individually talk about their childhoods in the United States and the influence of their mothers. The third section, “American Translation,” again unfolds stories of daughters, but now they connect their childhoods’ experiences to their present adult situation and life. In the last section of the novel, “Queen mother of the Western Skies,” the mothers try to link their past to the lives of their daughters.

Flor Bravis Lopez comments that the mothers were literally and physically detached and separated from their maternal ancestry due to cultural implications, whereas the daughters in the novel are figuratively disconnected from their mothers due to other racial, cultural and generational differences. Therefore, the mother and daughter relationships depicted from the daughters’ perspective are organised differently from that those of the mothers. One important aspect of the cultural differences between the mothers and daughters is the fact that they are torn between two linguistic worlds and do not speak the same language. In spite of the fact that the daughters grew up with the Chinese language, they cannot understand the words of the mothers properly. Chinese is not their language of expression, because it was not the main language spoken at home, due to the fact that the families depicted in the novel were not created in China, but in the United States. The fathers and mothers came from different Chinese linguistic backgrounds and only had broken English as a common language. Therefore, the language spoken at home has become a mixture of two Chinese dialects and English.

Throughout the novel, the differences between mother and daughter are stressed by the linguistic discrepancy. These differences between mother and daughter are most evidently reflected in the Chinese stories the mothers tell. The mothers’ stories mostly reflect a world which is unknown and fairy tale-like to the daughters. Therefore, the daughters unable to fully grasp the meaning of what is told by their mothers, also because the mothers’ broken English does not allow the stories to be translated in proper English. Ying-Ying’s daughter, Lena St. Clair explains: “I could understand the words perfectly, but not the meanings. One thought led to another without connection”. Jing-mei Woo realises that: “My mother and I never really understood one another. We translated each other’s meanings and I seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother heard more” (27). Rose Hsu Jordan, daughter of An-mei Hsu says that she believed everything her mother said, even though she could not

understand her meaning (206). Also, her mother's creation of the Old Mr. Chou, the man who holds all the dreams, scares and confuses Rose as a child and keeps inspiring Rose's nightmares, until she is an adult. The linguistic differences between mother and daughter hinder complete understanding.

Amy Tan exhibits efficiently the mother and daughter relationship influenced by cultural and racial factors. Although the mothers and daughters both are aware of the disturbed relationship due to the inability to communicate, literally and figuratively, ultimately, they find a way to connect. The mothers' connection to their own mothers is polluted by factors such as gender, class and culture, whereas the daughters' connection to the mothers is influenced by the clash between the old Chinese culture and the new American culture, with all its complications.

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