

MAXINE HONG KINGSTON'S *THE WOMAN WARRIOR*: SPEAKING FOR SILENCED

Sammar Ayaz*

Lecturer, Department of English Abbottabad University of Science and Technology Havelian.
sammar820@gmail.com

Manzoor Ilahi

Lecturer, Department of English Hazara University Sub- Campus Battagram.
smanzoorelahi962@gmail.com

Seema Safer

M.Phil Scholar, Department of Linguistics the University of Haripur, Haripur, Pakistan
seemasafeer1986@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present research paper discusses Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior. Kingston being a Chinese American writer touches upon the predicaments of silenced women and her selected novel advocates for these silenced characters. The study investigates that where does lie silence of Chinese-American immigrant and secondly silence of Chinese women in traditional Chinese society. Although there is the taboo "not tell" but Kingston manages to break the silence. She re-writes with the help of her experience and imaginative power and articulates the voiceless thoughts. The most important form of voice is speaking. In this respect Kingston herself realizes the importance of articulation from her own experience, besides "no name woman" she presents those characters who are capable to express their thoughts by articulation and among them brave orchid represents the strongest voice as her name itself suggests. This qualitative study implies feministic model of Madson and content analysis content technique and interprets data accordingly.

Keywords: Silence, femininity, marginalization, Chinese, American

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Chinese Versus American Femininity Being a member of the "model minority" isn't all Maxine struggles with; Chinese culture, along with constant reminders from her family and community, tell her that her gender has little value. Despite being born and raised in the US, China proves to have a culture "who's layers of tradition govern the lives of the Chinese even when they are far away in America" (Huntley 90). Traditional Chinese society is "male dominant . . . kinship system" and men are the foundation of community networks" (Simmons 50). Because women were raised to eventually be given over to their husband's family where they remained subordinate, they never really belonged to their immediate family or to their in-laws. Asian women were supposed to be "hyper-feminine" with "passive, weak, silent, and overly submissive" features (Pyke & Johnson 2012). They were not granted an "individual identity separate from their family role" (p. 38) consistent with the Confucian moral code, and lacked "control over the outcomes of their lives" (Ngan-Ling Chow 1998). Because of this, these women become an "internal colonized group" within the Asian-American minority that is discriminated against in the US (293). Maxine Hong Kingston faces it invisibility as a second generation Chinese immigrant trying to understand the world of his parents, and how to incorporate this ancient culture into contemporary American society. This leads her to "a sense of split personality and juxtaposed identity", which highlights her lack of affiliation in either space (Aoki, 2013). This cultural dichotomy, as seen in the warrior enforces conflicting expectations on Maxine, turning her into an "other" who must sail along the borders of both cultures. In the view of Homi K Bhabha, the historical certainty and settled nature of that term against it is written of the western nation is an obscure

* Corresponding Author

and ubiquitous form of living the locality of culture. This locality is more around temporality than about historicity: a form of living that is more complex than 'community'; more symbolic than 'society'; more connotative than 'country'; less patriotic than patrie; more rhetorical than the reason of state; more mythological than ideology; less homogeneous than hegemony; less centered than the citizen; more collective than 'the subject'; more psychic than civility; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications - gender, race or class - than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism.

This research paper specifically deals with *The Women Warrior*. In this respect discussion revolves around Kingston's writing is a tool as empowering the voiceless with voice. The study investigates that where does lie silence of Chinese-American immigrant and secondly silence of Chinese women in traditional Chinese society. For primary source the study has consulted maximum examples from the selected novel, while for secondary sources contains critic's comments and references from other literary works. This topic also has been already discussed by different critics and writers. Previous established works are used as secondary source.

Maxine Kingston is one of the most famous Chinese American writers in late 20th century. She wrote "the woman warrior" in 1975 which is a semi- autobiography that is known as "the best Asian American text. It has been translated more than 20 languages all over the world and used in disciplines including American literature, anthropology, Asian American studies, education, woman studies and so on.

It is divided into five chapters which mainly narrate the stories to five Chinese women who are inspirational figures of "the woman warrior" to the young Kingston in her childhood memories. In chapter one she is hunted by the tragic story of her aunt "no name woman" who is considered as shame and deliberately forgotten by her family because of the illegitimate pregnancy. In second chapter "white tiger" the narrator combines Chinese classic literature with her own imaginative power and re-write the story of the legendary Chinese woman warrior "Fa Mulan". In the third chapter the narrator describes the mother experience in china and her life in U.S as immigrant. In fourth chapter " At the western palace" she describes her aunt Moon orchid's story and her mental break down after the immigration to U.S from China in order to her husband. In the final chapter "a song for a Barbarian Reed pip" she focused on her childhood experience in U.S and her struggle in finding her own voice and identity.

DISCUSSION

Silence as symbol of female victimization

In respect of primary source I take two most silent female figures in "the woman warrior"—Kingston's aunt "no name woman" and her other aunt "moon orchid" in woman warrior". both female figures are mute. The very opening lines are symbolic "you must not tell anyone –what I am about to tell you". The lines symbolically show the silence of female in traditional Chinese society. "No name woman" in this sense is representation of woman of Chinese society where male is all and all. Woman victimization can be further proved with a lot of textual references. The following lines show female silence, marginalization, gender biased and male dominant society "If you tell your family, I'll beat you. I'll kill you. Be here next week" (page. 7) The cited lines clearly show the domination on women in male patriarchal society and they are treated like slave.

Moreover, being girl was a sign of something very unwelcoming and undesirable. The following line reveals the same, "Baby was probably a girl otherwise may be not died" (p. 30) Even, the birds and animals were considered more worth raising than girl, "It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters" and "He was no stranger because village housed no strangers, she obeyed him, she always did as she was told" (p. 43).

In traditional Chinese society women were not allowed to join unconventional professions such as army, sports and adventure. They were mercilessly punished for being rebellious against the established norms of the society. The following lines exhibit the same, "Chinese executed women who disguised themselves as soldiers or students, no matter how bravely they fought or how high they scored on the examinations" (p. 39).

All quoted lines show the male dominancy, gender biased woman silence and so on. "No name woman" who is raped by the person whose identity is not disclosed, she is forced to remain silent. Kingston's "no name woman" symbolically represents that woman who remains silent doesn't resist

like her aunt becomes nameless and are forgotten even by family members. Woman how much able may be but she

In Chinese traditional society woman was not considered capable of anything. So much burden was woman on the society that “geese were better than girls” woman whatever and to what extent had able but had no position in traditional society. They were not allowed to participate in the domain where men were.

The old feudal China was dominated by Confucianism that advocates male supremacy and female inferiority. One of the important doctrine of Confucianism on woman was “three obedience as four virtues” three obedience’s are that woman must obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage and sons after her husband’s death. While four virtues were she should know her position and behave according to natural laws, she should guard her words and not speak too much, she should be dressed well to please men and finally she should not avoid her family’s duties”.(hin 2007)

Silence as reflection of early Chinese immigrants and their community

Silence illustrates the situation of the entire Chinese American community in American history. Chinese American immigrants were crushed and deliberately neglected by main stream society over a long period due to sociopolitical factors in history. They were voiceless and took hard labor in especially in initial stage.

As Cheung points out “Chinese American silences were reinforced by anti-Asian immigrants’ laws (1988). Indeed the Chinese immigrants’ lives were hard and depriving in America before the effect of “the Chinese exclusion Act”. (1882).

As Kingston says “dying in the foreign country without being able to return to motherland is a real tragedy of Chinese people”. (13). Secondly most of the 1st generation Chinese couldn’t communicate in English so they were mute because of linguistic gap.

Various critics including African American writers, Alice welder’s “the colour purple, Mitsuye Yamada, Theresa Hak Kyung cha and so on discussed silence in various dimensions in order to explore relationship among race, gender, sexuality and so on. E.D Huntley argues that silence as the theme of novel in multiple forms, it can be seen as resistance of Asian American woman against the various form of oppression in their lives” Kingston criticizes both to Chinese patriarchal tradition and the American racist attitude. Both traditions have “silent woman”.

Kingston’s writing as tool of voice for both immigrants and mute woman

Although there is the taboo “not tell” but Kingston manages to break the silence. She re-writes with the help of her experience and imaginative power and articulates the voiceless thoughts. The most important form of voice is speaking. In this respect Kingston herself realizes the importance of articulation from her own experience, besides “no name woman” she presents those characters who are capable to express their thoughts by articulation and among them brave orchid represents the strongest voice as her name itself suggests.

Kingston’s success is of two reasons in my view, her mother’s talk-stories and her own beautiful imaginative power. In the novel she with the help of her imaginative power re-writes her aunt’s ignored tale which “my aunt hunts me”. Similarly her skillful legendary tale of “Fa Mulan” through which she proves that woman is also capable of all those activities which the men are. “Fa Mulan” story strongly presents the strong image of woman and her own childhood spirit. Her mother talks orally but she talks printed on page. Kingston in this respect she creates a version which breaks the silence in a more nonviolent resistance. She by narrating the life stories of her aunt and other women in her family from her mother, aunt, friend meanwhile she covers a wider variety of subjects such as social problems of Chinese immigrants in America, the generation gap, mother daughter relation, confusion of identity, oral literature, myth and legend. Kingston’s view is western feministic ideology to rebel against the patriarchal Chinese American society. Her re-writing the classic Chinese literature to remove the traditional Confucian doctrine on woman and creates new Chinese woman who demands independence and equality. Her “Fa Mulan” is the best example of independent woman. “I am the female revenges” (the W/W).

In feministic view Madson points out “in each chapter there is offered a feministic role which offers a model of feminine identity that Kingston tries to give a voice”

Final word: here I will quote Kingston own intention which will help my claim to be more authentic.

-“Kingston’s own interview as a guest lecturer in Fa Dan University in china (2004).

“As a Chinese-American, I believe that writing is a new power, a source of strength, a new method of being a warrior in society. This power is based on the understanding of the history of your own nation; this power is based on accepting old stories and songs. When someone is talking stories and singing song, others will obtain this power. The responsibility of a writer is to build a bridge between herself and the others in order to help others to understand human individual and the society”.

Further research can be made in respect of hybrid cultural study Chinese American regarding different mixed race people. Where people lose their identity for this purpose Chinese American writers should be further studied. It is writer's literary work which endows them their lost identity back. As writing is a powerful weapon in the hand of any writer through which he or she can change the norm of society if not change but at least can highlight the issues and Kingston really does the same through her genuine taste of literary sense.

Kingston's empowering women by creating individualized voices for them also extends to her own mother. Because Brave Orchid, despite her many years in America, does not speak English, she is effectively voiceless in her new world. Through Kingston, however, Brave Orchid's achievements are vocalized and recorded, as are all of the women's lives in *The Woman Warrior*. Kingston's memoir reveals Brave Orchid's sacrifices and lifts her out of the nameless Chinese crowd living in America. Ironically, however, this process of voicing women's experiences threatens Kingston's own self-esteem, especially in her relationship with her mother. For example, when a delivery boy mistakenly delivers pharmaceutical drugs to the family's laundry business, Brave Orchid is livid: Certainly, she thinks, the drugstore purposefully delivered the drugs to bring bad luck on her family. Brave Orchid forces Kingston, as the oldest child, to demand "reparation candy" from the druggist, a chore that Kingston finds embarrassing. "You can't entrust your voice to the Chinese, either," Kingston writes; "they want to capture your voice for their own use. They want to fix up your tongue to speak for them." In addition, Kingston's embarrassment stems from her perception that Chinese sounds "chingchong ugly" to Americans, like "guttural peasant noises."

CONCLUSION

Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* implies autobiographical history of the author encoded through characters. Kingston herself realizes the importance of articulation from her own experience, besides "no name woman" she presents those characters who are capable to express their thoughts by articulation and among them Brave Orchid represents the strongest voice as her name itself suggests. She has given voice to voiceless women in the novel. By unveiling the male patriarchal Chinese society, the writer has revealed the suffering of women and through her characterization she has spoken for silenced women and hence endowed them voice.

REFERENCES

- Boghossian, Paul. (2001) "What is social Construction?" Times Literary Supplement.
- Chow, E. N. L. (1998). The development of feminist consciousness among Asian American women. *Asian American women and gender*, 2-17.
- Homi Bhabha, "Dissemination: Time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation," in *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha Ed. New York: Routledge, 1990, pp. 291-322.
- Kingston, M. H. (1989). *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. 1976. New York: Vintage.
- Moore, J. L., & Madison-Colmore, O. (2005). Using the HERS model in counseling African American women. *Journal of African American Studies*, 9, 39-50.
- Nelson, H. S., Chapman, K. R., Pyke, S. D., Johnson, M., & Pritchard, J. N. (2003). Enhanced synergy between fluticasone propionate and salmeterol inhaled from a single inhaler versus separate inhalers. *Journal of allergy and clinical immunology*, 112(1), 29-36.
- Struzik, H. (2015). The woman warrior: The silent creation of a third space. *The Oswald Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English*, 17(1) 5.