



**WOMAN AND WOMANHOOD IN “THE WOMAN WARRIOR” BY  
MAXINE HONG KINGSTON**

Mamatqulova Kumushoy  
Student, 2nd year MA Student, UzSWLU

Dilnoza Ruzmatova  
Supervisor, PhD, Associate Prof., UzSWLU

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>KEYWORDS</b>
<p>‘She’ is a pronoun which designates female gender in English language. The study of the female role becomes pivotal when it comes to diaspora which is an automatic generated notification due to cultural clash. The feeling of diaspora unveils interesting episodes of cultural juxtaposition and conflicts. Women are considered to be an integral part of any culture. She is the bearer of culture and she is the representative of culture. Woman and womanhood is a very actual theme in any society. Thanks to feminist writers who published a lot of fictions and non-fictions due to make aware of women’s rights and feelings to the world. Especially in diaspora literature we can see a number of writers contributed for increasing the role of women. The concept of diaspora is associated with migration and dispersal. The term, in common parlance, signifies any people living outside their homeland.</p>	

Etymologically, the term “diaspora” comes from the Greek verb “diasperien”, which is a composite of dia meaning “across” and sperien meaning “to sow or scatter seeds.”<sup>1</sup> In recent years meaning of diaspora has been broadened by professors such as Safran, Cohen and Tololyan. Diaspora now carries not only its two historical meanings but also other acquired significations. It retains the idea of dispersal and productivity from the Greek roots. It equally signifies the condition of forceful dislocation of people and resultant experience of bitterness associated with Jews. Broadly, diaspora functions as metaphoric designations for several categories of people – expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities tout court – in much the same way as ‘ghetto’ has come to designate all kinds of crowded, constricted, and unprivileged

<sup>1</sup> Hem Raj Kafle Diaspora Studies: Roots and Critical Dimensions. Bodhi An Interdisciplinary Journal · 2010p-137

urban environments, and ‘holocaust’ has come to be applied to all kinds of mass murder.<sup>2</sup> There are plenty of nations suffers from dispersion and it is tempting to learn their history by literature. Since, literature represents truth about the society by witnesses and fictitious characters. One of them Chinese-American diaspora, which appeared in the nineteenth century because of great immigration of Chinese people to United States has been commonly investigated in recent years. The first immigrants were laborers and poor workers who came to earn money. However, there were students and good writers who wrote poems, stories and novels in both Chinese and English language. Nowadays, the genre of Chinese-American diaspora has its great position in literature with such authors Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Sui Sin Far and Frank Chin. Their major themes are interaction between old China-born generation and younger America-born generation together with feminism.

It is impossible to imagine Chinese-American diaspora literature without Maxine Hong Kingston and her contribution. She is well-known for her several novels and non-fictions about Chinese-Americans such as *The Woman Warrior: Memoir of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, *Chine Man*, *Tripmaster Monkey*. Kingston’s writing style differs from others. She can do describing reality and truth of life with the help of unreal stories. She is a good storyteller like her mother that can be seen in her “*The Woman Warrior*”. It seems that her writing is defining her own identity as a woman and dealing with women’s issues in society. In her first published *The Woman Warrior* she represents Chinese culture by portraying her own experiences. Even though she has never been in China, her mother’s talk stories give her enough familiarity with Chinese culture. This novel is memoir of Kingston includes stories of different women connected biologically and psychically to her. During the telling their stories, Kingston creates her own stories about herself.

In her books, Maxine Hong Kingston speaks not only for herself and Chinese immigrants but for all marginal groups who have not yet found their own voice in an alien or oppressive culture. In her books she attempts to reconcile the two heritages and out of them forge her own identity. On the one hand, her mother encouraged her to remain essentially Chinese, accepting the subordinate female role in the traditional Chinese family. On the other hand, her mother related stories of mythic Chinese women who were brave, daring, and strong. Unable to win battles as the mythic woman warrior did, Kingston’s victories were her grades.<sup>3</sup> Her unusual novels brought Kingston not only fame but also being real American writer because people read her novels in English not in Chinese, as she pointed out “I am an American writer, who, like other American writers, wants to write the great American novel”.

*The Woman Warrior* is the first published novel of Maxine Hong Kingston in which there are experiences of different female characters. Main purpose of Kingston in *The Woman Warrior* is to show difficulties of women in the family and society and to explain difference between being Chinese and Chinese-American woman and its circumstances. Even though main focus is growing up in Chinese-American family, Kingston starts his novel with a story of her no name aunt. This story was told her by her mother in order to warn her about adultery and its worse consequences. From the

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<sup>2</sup> Hem Raj Kafle. *Diaspora Studies: Roots and Critical Dimensions*. Bodhi An Interdisciplinary Journal · 2010p-138

<sup>3</sup> Michael Hollister. *Analysis of The Woman Warrior: Memoir of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. New York 2014. p-2

beginning till the end the matter of woman and womanhood is illustrated by the author. According to the novel the first problem of Chinese women is considering them as unacceptable by society. Especially any immoral act of women might cause even a death. Another issue which Chinese women suffer from is treason. Because of financial and social problems of that time a lot of men left their family to find a job overseas. Some of them did not return to China as they established new life and better career in foreign countries. Kingston tells a story about her aunt Moon Orchid who forced her husband's betrayal. In turn, Kingston describes her as a loyal woman to her family and husband as she waits for her husband thirty years without interrupting him. Consequently, she maddened acting her as if Mexican ghosts follow her in everywhere.

The *Woman Warrior* discusses foot-binding, sexual enslavement, and infanticide of baby girls, but it also tells of a woman who brandishes a sword to save her people. Maxine Hong Kingston recounts learning about life through the stories of her mother and grandmother. The women pass along a female identity, a personal identity, and a sense of who the narrator is as a woman in a patriarchal Chinese culture.<sup>4</sup> There is another female character is warrior woman Fa Mulan in the chapter "White Tigers". "White Tigers" is a clear depiction of Chinese womanhood through Kingston's perspective. Through in terms of its potentials as well as its limitations" (Lan). One could argue, however this merging of fantasy and reality, Kingston "explores the nature of Chinese womanhood, that even in Kingston's Mulan fantasy Chinese women are still bound under national and cultural values. According to Feng Lan's account in "The Female Individual and the Empire: A Historicist Approach to Mulan and Kingston's *Woman Warrior*," Kingston's woman warrior story captures "the dilemma of the Chinese female caught in the contradiction between individual pursuit and communal commitment under specific historical circumstances—a dilemma that sheds light on the shared identity of Kingston's Mulan."<sup>5</sup> By this mythological character the writer demonstrate her feelings and wishes for being strong and brave woman. Kingston tells her real experiences and stories by mixing them up. No matter what is true or myth all event and characters serve to explore female identity in society. Kingston largely figuring out what it means for her to be a Chinese-American woman by way of considering the lives of great Chinese women before her: her nameless aunt, her mom Brave Orchid, the warrior Fa Mulan, her aunt Moon Orchid, and Ts'ai Yen. This is a coming-of-age story and a memoir of girlhood. Issues this book includes motherhood, daughterhood, sisterhood, child-rearing, child-bearing, wifehood, and patriarchy are explored. She does not satisfy from any of them of these positions. As a daughter she hates her mother, in spite of the fact that her mother was care about her children. The way Maxine's mother is introduced is through the sharing of a forbidden story. Stories morph into a recurring theme where Maxine places herself in the stories to make sense of how she is to communicate with her mom, considering she is the negative image of a daughter and clashes with the ideals of Chinese womanhood. It is through the stories, especially of Fa Mu Lan, where Maxine becomes the woman warrior. By doing this, she follows in her mother's footsteps, arguably a woman warrior in her own right. By the time the final section comes into play, Maxine and the reader are

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<sup>4</sup>Napikoski, Linda. "Maxine Hong Kingston's "The Woman Warrior"." ThoughtCo, Aug. 27, 2020, pp-1

<sup>5</sup> Essey writer. *The Woman Warrior: a Personal Novel of Maxine Hong Kingston*, April 13, 2021 p-1

able to correlate and connect the other stories with Brave Orchid's and Maxine's lives.<sup>6</sup> Her mother prefers coming back to her motherland China than enduring hard labor. However, Chinese culture is obscure for Kingston and her siblings. When Kingston thinks about motherhood and wifehood, she rejects being wife and mother like Chinese women. Even her girlhood passes along with finding her own identity and voice and she comes across difficulties at school.

As a reader one can conclude that Maxine Hong Kingston's "The Woman Warrior" is a great work which conveys a subject matter of woman and womanhood to people. From her writing, a reader understands how the bicultural writer finds her identity and how she deals with her womanhood and interrelation with her mother.

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