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# **CONFLICTS IN RELATIONSHIP- A STUDY ON THE BONESETTER'S DAUGHTER**

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## **Abstract:**

Amy Tan is an American writer, whose work explores the mother-daughter relationships and the Chinese-American experience. The researcher has chosen, *The Bonesetter's daughter* and her focus is on the clashes found within the relationships throughout the novel. The title of the novel goes in parallel with the main character of the first generation mentioned as Precious Auntie, the daughter of a famous bonesetter. Conflicts between Precious Auntie and her daughter LuLing and the second generation mother, LuLing with her daughter, Ruth was reflected by the researcher. Tan considers that relationship should be held up with caution and communication is a significant source to fulfill the deed. The root cause of conflicts is primarily because of miscommunication and this is due to the variation in culture. As women perform a significant role in the novel; the researcher approaches the novel in a feminist point of view.

**Keywords: Conflicts, miscommunication, relationship, culture.**

## **Introduction**

Amy Tan is a contemporary American writer born in Oakland, California on February 19, 1954. She was born to Chinese immigrants Daisy and John Tan. Her works explore mother-daughter relationships and Chinese-American experiences. Tan's best-selling novels were *The Kitchen God's Wife*, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, *The Hundred Secret Senses*, *Saving Fish from Drowning*, and *The Valley of Amazement*. Chinese American Literature began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and flowered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The common themes followed are the challenges, interaction between generation, and identity.

The researcher has chosen, *The Bonesetter's daughter* and her focus is on the clashes found within the relationships throughout the novel. Relationships in the novel are entirely contradictory. Like the mother-daughter relationship in the novel, Tan too doesn't mingle up well with her mother. The novel is more over autobiographical and was adapted into an opera in 2008.

### **Background to the study**

*The Bonesetter's Daughter* was Tan's fourth novel, published in 2001. The novel compacts with the story of an immigrant Chinese woman and her American-born daughter. The researcher textures that there are two main stories in the novel. The first story moves with Ruth, a Chinese-American woman who lives in San Francisco and her fright about her mother, who is becoming more demented. The second major story is about the letters to Ruth, written by her mother, Lu Ling. The life story of Lu Ling in china has been written by herself. A three generation story has been accumulated by Tan in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*.

The title of the novel goes in parallel with the main character of the first generation mentioned as Precious Auntie, the daughter of a famous bonesetter. A bonesetter is a person who realigns the disjointed bones. The plot then moves with the second generation daughter, Lu Ling, followed by the third generation American-born women, Ruth. There is a story within the story and Tan has sustained the novel in a flashback technique.

As Women perform a significant role in the novel; the researcher approaches the novel in a Postcolonial feminist point of view. The inventions by the colonial state against the social practices that oppressed women have been described as Postcolonial Feminism that is where the colonial government intervened on behalf of women. The women characters in the novel move with such situation throughout the novel and each one has been suffering in their own way. When the women struggle with the legacies of colonialism in the postcolonial era, they are repeatedly accused of importing Western ideas.

### **Discussion**

The relationship brings people together and that must be held up with caution. The researcher detects that there is a cold war running in almost all the relationships and three major relationships have been highlighted in the paper. Relationship fails only with the lack of communication. No matter how problematic a situation is, if appropriate communication exists, the problem can be rectified. Time doesn't wait for people to come together in life.

When they understand the ethics of relationship, half of their life will be already ruined by fate.

Misunderstanding continues in a relationship without a proper communication and the indication was filtered clearly through the mother-daughter relationship outweighed in the novel. In Lu Ling and Ruth's relationship, the major reason for their misunderstanding and the lack of communication is due to the cultural difference. Unlike the normal mother-daughter relationship, their interaction seems entirely diverse. As Lu Ling grew up in a Chinese setting, she tries to impose Chinese culture and ideology to her daughter, Ruth. Ruth was not ready to accept the actualities by her mother, justifying that she was an American. Lu Ling believes in ghosts, and fears that the ghost has a power to haunt her whole family ruining Ruth's life.

To her mother, just about anything was a sign of ghosts: broken bowls, barking dogs, phone calls with only silence or heavy breathing at the other end. (12)

Ruth doesn't really respect Lu Ling's feelings from her childhood as it is difficult for her to understand. At the end of their fights, Lu Ling always claims that she will kill herself or it is better if she dies soon. Ruth was not ready to share her life happenings to Lu Ling, fearing about the response. When Ruth thought that she was pregnant with Lance's baby, she decides to commit suicide than to share the problem with her mother to find a solution.

When Ruth wanted to grow her hair so long, Lu Ling simply restricted that it looks like a suicide maiden. The hatred in their relationship grew stronger when Ruth understood that Lu Ling was against her desires.

She had wanted to grow her hair long the way the other girls did, but her mother made her cut it short. "Long hair look like suicide maiden," Lu-Ling had said. (24)

Lu Ling handles Ruth a bundle of letters comprising of her own life story in China. Ruth doesn't want to know about her mother and the Chinese culture. But later, when she sympathizes with Lu Ling's condition about dementing, Ruth wanted to know more about her mother and her past life.

"Just some old things about my family," she had said, with the kind of awkward nonchalance that meant the pages were important. "My story, begin little-girl time. I write for myself, but maybe you read, then you see how I grow up, come to this country." (14)

After reading Lu Ling's story, Ruth accepts and understands her past life. She realizes why she raised Ruth in the way, trying to impose the Chinese culture and why she believed in the existence of the dead people as ghosts. Threatening to kill herself, Lu Ling doesn't really mean that she will die but gives an unforeseen note to Ruth that she loves her to the core and so she can't do that to Ruth like her mother did to Lu Ling. The conflict prevailing has been fixed when Lu Ling apologizes to Ruth in the end of the novel.

The second relationship, with a conflict in the novel intended to discuss, is Lu Ling and her mother Precious Auntie. Initially, Precious Auntie was familiarized to Lu Ling as her nursemaid. She spends her whole day with Precious Auntie doing nothing but just accompanying her. Fed up with her life, Precious Auntie decides to commit suicide but in contrast, her life was saved but not her voice and face.

No one else understood Precious Auntie's kind of talk, so I had to say aloud what she meant. Not everything, though, not our secret stories (3)

Their life and relationship were smoother until Lu Ling reached her age of marriage. Chang, the antagonist of the novel wants Lu Ling's hand for his fourth son, Chang Fu Nan. The marriage proposal was not with the fortitude to own Lu Ling as their daughter-in-law, but with a hope that she might help their family to find the dragon bones, which yield a huge profit. Precious Auntie doesn't want her to marry Chang Fu Nan and was completely against this will. As Lu Ling doesn't know her past, she was not ready to accept the fact.

You cannot, I forbid you. It's not for you to decide! (215)

In the midst of their argument, Precious Auntie often exclaims that she decided to live only for the sake of her daughter. Lu Ling doesn't know that Precious Auntie was her mother until her death. She feels apologetic and guilty for considering Precious Auntie wicked only after understanding the letters written to her.

Sometimes I wish I were already dead. I wanted to die, really I did, but I came back for you (204).

The letter that Precious Auntie wrote to Lu Ling explains her whole life as a bonesetter's daughter and how her day of marriage twisted as a lifelong tragedy. She missed both her husband and father on the same day. If there was a proper communication between Lu Ling and Precious Auntie, her life would have been saved from committing suicide.

I read her words. *Your mother, your mother, your mother, I am your mother.* (243)

Lu Ling feels guilty for her mother and desires to talk to Precious Auntie's ghost, with the help of her daughter, Ruth. When she understands her mother, time fled away and Precious Auntie was no longer with her.

The third mother-daughter relationship with a conflict is, Ruth and her daughters, Dory and Sofia. The girls do not get along well with Ruth, as she was not their real mother and they don't belong to her. Ruth couldn't accept the lifestyle and the culture followed by the daughters. This was the main reason for their endless dispute. Once Ruth leaves the house to take care of her terribly ill mother, the girls can't endure her absence and started realizing how much Ruth really mean to them.

Ruth was pleased that they missed her. 'I don't know, honey, Waipo needs me.' 'We need you too.' (318)

The girls call Lu Ling as Waipo, which means grandmother in Chinese. They hate their grandmother for her poor English and the Chinese culture she sticks on to. They don't listen to Lu Ling's directions and comments.

### **Summation**

All the flaws and misunderstandings in the following relationships are resolved as the novel ends. Lack of communication is a slow poison that completely kills a relationship. Ruth, in the end, realizes that she too had a family and was happy for being a part of bonesetter's generation.

These are the women who shaped the life, who are in her bones. They caused her to question whether the order and disorder of her life were due to fate or luck, self-determination or the action of others. They taught her to worry. But she has also learned that these warning were passed down, not simply to scare her, but to force her to avoid these footsteps, to hope for something better. They wanted her to get rid of curses. (402)

All the characters in the novel have sacrificed their life in one way or the other for the sake of their bond. The fractures in a relationship can be mended only with the help of communication. From the novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the researcher tries to filters the cause for the imperfections in a relationship and provides a resolution in her paper.

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