



## Woman as a Victim in Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Among the White Moon Faces*

Dr.R.S.Regin Silvest  
Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
Malankara Catholic College  
Mariagiri, Kanyakumari  
Tamilnadu, INDIA

*Among the White Moon Faces* depicts the struggles faces by an individual in an alien world. Lim expresses the identity and cultural issues undergone by her in the new world. Before coming to America she struggles in Malaysia and China. She lost her own culture and identity in Malaysia and China. Because China and Malaysia are westernized with the influence of other countries. As she thought she can escape from the westernized images of China and Malaysia she immigrates to United States at the age of twenty. After coming to United States that she feels that her home land is far better than her alien land. As United States has the modern culture which Lim cannot adopt as it is very new to her. She praises her home land “shining waters, lush growth, and multiracial colors” (*AWMF* 209). She could identify that United States is fully corrupted and destroyed. People in United States were following an unlawful culture and they possess a different identity. Lim states that United States is “polluted streams, back lanes and communal quarrels” (*AWMF* 209).

Lim she struggles in this new land. Before she is coming to United States she is torn between the culture of Malaysia and China. Lim believes that she can create a new culture in that she can have an identity. But there she faces a different cultural and mixed racial issues. Already she has and identity of Chinese-Malaysian identity. She has come across many social and cultural issues in her homeland. But here in United States she has to have a bitter experience ever before. Lim is being haunted with the culture of Malaysia and China, but again in United States she is struggling with identity crisis. Even after twenty five years of her immigration she is struggling with the haunting memories of her past China and Malaysian life.

Lim's displacement from her homeland to American has created a transcultural identity with in herself. Moreover she suffers in homeland with in her family. The male members in her family has created problems to Lim. Lim has struggled to communicate with her own family members. The influence of languages from the other country has created many issues with the people of Malaysia and China. She feels difficult to communicate with her own mother, father, stepmother, and her eight brothers. She finds difficult to create an identity with in her own family. The cultural change within her home town also make Lim to struggle. But Lim learns that “how to grow up as a woman” (*AWMF* 101).

Even the educational system of her homeland is affected by the influence of Chinese and Malaysian. This system affects female, male and students and teachers. After coming to America Lim faces the same issue of educational system. The education she got from her home land is different in America. She struggles in the beginning of the communication with Americans. But her influence of Malaysian issues can be seen in every walk of life of Lim. She tries to unite with the communities in

America. But at last she succeeded within her family. She speaks with her husband and son with good accent. But her family rejects her communication in all ways. She struggles in her job place too. Her colleagues never accepted Lim as an American. They kept Lim with a distance and never allowed her to join with them.

Lim as a child itself tried to write in English. She hates Chinese and Malaysian languages. She believes that she can have an identity if she writes in English. Lim has chosen English language to overcome the social and cultural conflicts. The effort taken by Lim to create herself with the language of English, that helps her in America. In America people are speaking in English but she struggles to speak as she comes from the multi faced culture. But the language helped her to identify her as a writer, teacher, and student. She lives her life with cross culture identity but the language which she equipped from her childhood made her to learn more and created her a new identity.

Lim realized the multiple culture and identity will create issues. It will not help people in anyway. The self-consciousness within her made her to be aware of her language and culture. Even she has less connection with her Malaysian family. Lim's mother Emak has less connection within the family. Lim bears her hardship in her life from childhood to till end. Her attachment with her family especially with mother is very less. "No memory as a child of warm physical affection with [her] mother Emak appears in [her] child's album as a self-absorbed driven creature, them" (*AWMF* 30). Lim from her childhood physically and mentally suffered a lot. She is not well treated and cared by her family mothers or her relatives. Lim opines that:

absence of physical intimacy, the coldness she felt even as a very young child toward her mother, may be, in part, derived from the history of war time maternity, she wonders if the break was Lim is coming from an infant original coldness to another to the mother. (*AWMF* 30)

A few years she lived with her mother in Singapore. As her mother left her family and Lim, she settles in Singapore. While Lim visited her mother she never spoke to her daughter in a good way. She has some harsh laws and rules even toward her own daughter. Lim's mother never ask Lim to call her as Mother. Lim states that "You must call me Auntie" (*AWMF* 103). Lim has hated her mother as her mother is not showing her love and affection. As a daughter she never dislikes her mother but her mother always kept her daughter in a side. Because it is clear that even Lim along with her son she visits her mother. But her mother's activity was odd that earlier. Lim's mother never changed her attitude. Her mother's actions shows very clearly her nature "I was both her daughter and a stranger, someone she should have known intimately but never did" (*AWMF* 206). Lim feels deserted as her mother is not accepting her as daughter. She becomes cross cultured woman and unwanted daughter. But with her own effort and hardship she comes up with the skills of speaking English and writing. She believes that her effort will put her in good position. As she achieved something in the new land.

After the death of her mother Emak, Lim got a stepmother Peng. Again Lim faces social and cultural differences in the form of her step mother. Peng is a Chinese woman, Lim cannot communicate with her properly. Moreover the cultural differences made Lim not to have relationship with her own stepmother. Lim states that "Lim and her siblings were Western-educated children. Peng was a thoroughly Chinese woman. . .servant class" (*AWMF* 59). As Lim belongs to Chinese culture her western eduction changes her attitude. The more concentrated English language by Lim made her to forget Chinese language. Apart from that Peng is a low class woman, this made Lim to create more discriminate. Lim cannot accept even Peng as her father's wife. Lim states that "I do not remember a conversation with her in all the eight years I continued to live in the same house with her, although we addressed each other

occasionally and exchanged remarks” (*AWMF* 59). Lim lost her identity but she creates a new identity of her own.

Lim as a child she loves her father in a sexual way. She loves her father very much that any other family member. “I adorned my father’s body. . . it was my father’s body I reached out to touch when I roused in the night” (*AWMF* 31-32). Lim clearly portrays that the physical need of her is aroused even in her childhood. Moreover it shows that she tries to hide problems with oedipal way. As she was not taken care by her mother. Automatically the human beings tries to have attachment with someone. Lim has created the attachment with her father. Lim states that:

bond I sewed tight between my father and me was illicit. In Chinese family, perhaps in every family, daughters must be wary of their love for their fathers. We are constrained as daughters the ties that strain us to our fathers are tense with those constraints. A vast because fearfully crossable boundary must separate girl child from male parent. I wonder if all daughters suffer revulsion about their fathers’ bodies, instinctively reacting to save themselves from unacknowledged dangers. (*AWMF* 31)

As a lonely girl child, she has more attachment with her father. It creates a sexual relationship within themselves. It really creates a conflict in the mind of father and daughter. Both crossed their limits and forgets they are father and daughter. Even Lim was not talking to her stepmother, it shows that Lim is jealous of her stepmother. But this oedipal relationships ends at the age of five. “the guilt of her father” (*AWMF* 57). Lim also realized the mistakes which she commits with her father. She believes that this happened this because of his mother. So she forgives her father and also she says that her father is a good man as he loves his children “loved his children” (*AWMF* 31).

Lim’s father treats her in a good manner than her brothers. The odd behavior of her father made to afraid. She remembers the sexual happenings of her childhood. Her father would not take care of the male members of the family. Lim’s gender is a real tread to her life. Even she cannot have normal relation with her brothers. Because the identity of girl is a problematic, so Lim says that “my brother’s acceptance was preferable to my father’s favoritism. I rejected the identity of girl. Since I could not have both, I chose equality as a boy over privilege as a girl” (*AWMF* 25). To come out from the barriers of the identity and sex, Lim pretends to be a male gender. She wants to enjoy all the freedom in this society. Lim is accepted in the family if she is a male gender. She also believes that if she is a male gender she can “jump from high walls, to speed on a bicycle, or to stay out late alone at night” (*AWMF* 24-25).

With the strong root of Malaysia and China Lim has acquired multi culture. She established herself as a self-sufficient woman in the new land. The freedom in United States create a new way of identity and culture for herself. She forgets her own family, and lived a life of her own. Even the death of her father is came to know after long days. Death of her father also not created any kind of sadness in her life. But her inner hearts wants to maintain relations with her relatives. It is clear she send money to her stepmother and to her brothers. Lim thinks of the critical situation of her family so she send money to her livelihood. “family was starving? . . .children are also ourselves Oh Asia, that nets its children in ties of blood” (*AWMF* 164). Even the modern world creates her new identity and culture but still she hangs with faces the idea of her tradition.

To create her own identity Lim was in love affair with various men. Her gender is being questioned in the relationship with her lover. Lim’s relationship with James, Iqbal and Ben to create an

identity of her gender. She stands in the marriage market to have her identity, there also she fails to create an identity of her own. As a child she lost her virginity as she has to create her own gender identity. Even she acted like a male member to have a relationship with them. “she tried to overcome the taboo sex, lost her virginity” (*AWMF* 113). But she believes that she can create a gender identity in the new world. So in the new land she went out of her marriage life and had extramarital affair with various men in the new world. With all the extramarital relationship in Lim’s life creates a new questions of her gender identity. Lim realized that for a woman in tradition or in modern she has to undergo her gender identity.

James is a professor working with her, she has an extramarital affair with him. but in the beginning he was very pious and both are happy. Later James shows domination with Lim. Lim seriously dislikes this action of James, this attitude create a break in their relation. Lim’s relationship Ben also creates an identity issues of gender. His dominace nature is shows in the meantime of their extramarital affair. Lim states that her relation with Ben is like “zig-zagged between valuing. . . . Ben’s possessiveness and acting on a growing confused discontent” (*AWMF* 124). Her choice and idea to create gender identity with the extramarital affair ruins her life. Lim’s relationship with Iqbal was like a companionship. She enjoyed his relationship in the beginning period. But he orders to cook and serve food for him, she has work like a machine for him. He finds happiness in making more job to Lim. Lim started to hate him for his menial actions. She realized that she cannot create an identity of her own in the male dominated society.

Lim tries to come out of all the extramarital relations. Because it started to haunt her walk of life. she does not know what to be done to create a new identity, “functional and without rights” (*AWMF* 130). In the mean time she got an opportunity to get out of the situation. She was awarded as a Fulbright scholar, so she wants to leave to United States. The male gender tries to control Lim in all possible ways. But they could not succeed in it. She wants to have a life of her own, on one should mingle in her life. Lim is psychology and physically affected from her childhood. She is beings haunted by her past memories. Later as an immigrant woman also she has faces the same issues of gender and its discrimination. Even she was shocked to know the harsh face of modern people and culture in America.

Motherhood of Lim creates a different type of loneliness and identity issues. No one is there to care her in her critical situation. Lim thinks of her relatives and other friends no one is there to help her. “assimilation became a pressing reality as soon as I brought my son home from” the maternity ward” (*AWMF* 197). Lim even in this critical situation believes that at least her son can adopt the culture and identity of United States. Because he is a native born child he can adopt the culture and other systems of the new land. “native born children carry the cultural imprint of Americanism in a way that their immigrant parents cannot” (194). Lim also thought that sometimes she will face the difficulties to go along with his son.

Charles is a Jewish-American husband of Lim, her son Gershom is a supportive person in the life of Lim. This two male genders in Lim’s life creates a new and stable identity of Lim. She has developed her identity as a cross cultured woman in the new land. Even Lim had extramarital affair to create her identity, Charles becomes calm and good. She realized the nature of her husband after a long time. Lim realized as “Charles was the stable center that finally brought me calm” (*AWMF* 164). Lost her roots and identity Lim is diverted to many illicit ways. Later she realized the reality of life. Even a few close friends of Lim has made favour to Lim to calm her down. She suffered without culture, identity, language, and community she faces struggles “Without family and community, I had no social presence. I was among the unliving” (*AWMF* 155).

Charles, the husband of Lim is a man of calm. He made Lim to calm down from all her sufferings. Charles is a Polish Romanian American immigrant in the United States. He has realized the harsh issues of immigration in the alien world. So he can make Lim calm very easily. He teaches the harsh reality of the immigration to Lim. She has successfully become as a cross cultured woman in United States. As *Among the White Moon Faces* is a memoir of Lim she express her view in an interview. “Yes marriage to Charles did help me adjust to U.S. society. . .comfortable with his American location and identity. His ease obviously eased my entry into places that I might have felt uncomfortable” (Newton). Lim with help of Charles feels the freedom of American culture.

Lim as child to the end of this memoir she suffers in the name of gender and immigrant identity. Moreover as a woman she faces these issues to get out of these struggles. Cross culture in her own native land, even Malaysian Chinese identity, and other issues within her family. As a girl she has to face the taboo within her family. To construct her own identity within her own family she lost her virginity and tries to act like a male gender. Her gender is really a danger in her life. Lost her own identity and with multifaceted culture she suffers a lot in the society. Her marriage and extramarital affair are also causes various issues in her life, thought to create identity of her life but got struggles. The language also plays a vital role in her gender identity. At last her husband has showed and created a new identity to Lim. Lim finds happiness with the identity created by her husband and realized the reality of life. Lim got the identity of Chinese Malaysian American identity throughout her life.

### **Work Cited**

- Gunew, Sneja. “Gendered Reading Tactics: Public Intellectuals and Community in Diaspora [*Among the White Moon Faces*: An Asian-American Memoir of Homeland], [Volcano: A Memoir of Hawai’i].” *Resources for Feminist Research* 29.1/2 (2002): 57. Print.
- Lim, Shirley Geok-lin. *Among the White Moon Faces*. New York: Feminist, 1996. Print.
- Newton, Pauline T. “Walking with Her Muse: An Interview with Shirley Geok-lin Lim.” *Contemporary Women’s Writing* 8.2 (2014): 123-35. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpt005>
- Schutte, Ofelia. “Cultural Alterity: Cross-Cultural Communication and Feminist Theory in North-South Contexts.” *Hypatia* 13:2 (1998): 53-72. Print.
- Seller, Maxine Schwartz. ed. *Immigrant Women*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1994. Print.