

- . *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands*. Ed. Bill Schwarz. Allen Lane, 2017.
- . "New Ethnicities". *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Ed. David Morley and Kuan- Hsing Chen. Routledge, 1996. 441-449.
- . "Writing and Place". *Wasafiri* 19.42 (2004): 58–60.
- Hall, Stuart, Paul Du Gay, eds. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Sage Publications, 1996.
- McClintock, Anne, et. al., eds. *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspective*. U of Minnesota P, 2004.
- Procter, James. *Stuart Hall*. Routledge, 2004.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. Granta Books, 1991.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books, 1994.
- Young, Robert. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. Routledge, 2008.

CHAPTER 2

Theorizing the Concept of Survival, Transformation and Healing Space in Gloria Anzaldúa's 'To Live in the Borderlands Means You'

Dr. Reshmi S

The historical experiences of Chicanos or the Mexicans reflect the cultural dislocation and displacement by the mainstream American society. The Mexico/ United States border is a hybrid cultural meeting point of identity and border crossings. The instances of cultural infiltration pave way for external and internal oppression leading to othering of Chicanos. The practice of migration created the group entitled as "border crossers" who are doomed to live in borderland. The Mestizos or persons with mixed race alienate themselves from their racial heritage but some embrace the cultural background. The Chicano educator, writer and border activist, Gloria Anzaldúa positions herself within, between and among multiple cultural worlds. Straddled at once between the insider and outsider position, the writer bridges the interconnection between people of different races. The theoretical underpinning of Anzaldúa adopts the policy of inclusion as opposed to exclusion and tries to build identity in transformative ways. Further she envisages new ways of feminism, social justice movements and spiritual activism in an

attempt to heal internal strife and self-alienation. Anzaldúa's seminal work *Borderlands* is a perfect assemblage of the reflections on history, culture and autobiography. Sonia Saldivar Hull notes *Borderlands* "is a transfrontera, transdisciplinary text that has travelled between many disciplines". Borders need not cater to mere geographical demarcations of territories and Anzaldúa speaks about her experience of being divided between physical, linguistic, cultural and gender borders. The paper attempts to critically explore Anzaldúa's poem 'To Live in the Borderlands means you' as a work that echoes the turmoils of a mestiza. The stratification, prejudices and ideologies that background the race surface in the poem. Torn between linguistic differences, the person finds himself caught in a clash between cultures- White, Mexican and Native American. The mixing of racial groups and assimilation incorporates challenges to the people who live in the borderlands. The Mexican women live in this unfamiliar terrain facing obstacles and restrictions. This experience says Anzaldúa is painful yet articulates a transformative space where opposites confluence, conflict and transmute. Thus, the women of color become pioneers in alliance and coalition work; for her "alliance work is the attempt to shift positions, change positions, reposition ourselves regarding our individual and collective identities". In an attempt to subvert the system of domination – subordination, the women activists resist the cultural paradigms by inscribing their identities. Anzaldúa's concept of mestiza is closely tied with notions of ethnicity and new tribalism. Being exposed to the state of in-betweenness, mestiza becomes mediator, translator, negotiator and navigator of different locations. The study closely examines the theoretical contributions of Anzaldúa in the process of healing and

transformation.

The search for identity is a process of uniting the feminine and masculine elements within the individual psyche, of transforming warring opposites into an androgynous whole. But it is not an objective intellectual process that involves only the assimilation of facts; it is not concerned with knowledge removed from the context of real life experiences

(Barbara Warren, *The Feminine Image in Literature*)

Identity is the most pressing contemporary topic being discussed among literary and cultural circles. The multiplicity of identity categories due to gender, race, class, culture cannot unify women's experiences. Paul Moya observes "From a realist perspective, particular (ie racial or gender) identities are not something to transcend or subvert but something we need to engage with and attend to" ('Introduction' 17). In *This Bridge Called My Back*, Cherrie Moraga demonstrates her comprehension that coalitions across difference require a thorough understanding of how we are different from others, as well as how they are different from us. Because differences are relational, our ability to understand "other" depends largely on our willingness to examine our "self" (67-8 qtd. Paula Moya "Postmodernism").

The notion of diaspora appropriately interacted between multiple cultures, linguistic interventions and the question of homelands. The experience of the Chicanas in United States is that of a life in the borderlands betwixt American and Mexican culture. For her borderlands connote literal, physical and metaphorical space. The Mexican Americans, who form the major

ethnic group of United States, contribute to the genre of Latin American Studies. The principal image in Latina Studies is “the concept of borders- borders between nations, between cultures and within cultures” (Guerin 292). The existence of Latinas between two nations, cultures and languages are aptly exemplified by Gloria Anzaldua’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldua calls her own liminal or border space a challenge to live “on the borders and in margins, [where] keeping intact one’s shifting and multiple identity and integrity is like trying to swim in a new element, an alien element (*Borderlands* iii). The female Latina writers readdressed their ethnicity, gender roles and history different from men to liberate women from the oppressive realms and to make their voices audible through varied literary genres.

Anzaldua’s self -reflection as a Latina or Chicana woman and as a racial minority get reflected in *Borderlands*. The people straddling between the borders and their identity formation is much discussed by Anzaldua. The life recordings and testimonials of Chicanas (Mexican American women), Tejanas (Mexican Texan women) and the experiences of the mestizas (Mexican American women of mixed Native American and Spanish heritage) centers around identity, identity formation and their encounters with race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. The concept of borderland identity seems to be devoid of the sense of self. Herrera-Sobek says “Anzaldua’s *Borderlands* evidences a will to reconfigure this loss of place, space and history and reterritorialize the Chicano population in the American Southwest” (2006).

The mestiza heritage, ancestry and consciousness never shun Anzaldua from empowering the minority or mixed-race population. The Spanish term ‘mestizo’ and French ‘mestisse’

“have begun to reflect a perception in these cultures that miscegenation and interchange between the different cultural diasporas had produced new and powerful synergistic cultural forms” (Ashcroft et al., 136). The inclusionary nature of Mestiza identity reflects a paradigm shift out of ideological social conventions and symbolizes the phase of “border crossings”. Like Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith, Anzaldua connected feminist themes interlinked to race, gender and sexuality. Sonia Saldivar-Hull claims that Anzaldua’s methodology is “unearthing a razed indigenous history as a process of coming to consciousness as political agents of change”. Anzaldua’s work falls within the framework of Border Studies which cover multiculturalism, ethnic and boundary conflicts. Borders encompass physical, psychological and the concept of crossing visible and invisible boundaries. In the Preface to *Borderlands*, she talks about:

psychological borderlands, sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact the borderlands are physically present where two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between the two individuals shrink with intimacy (19).

The essence of life in the borderlands and borderland identity are aptly summarized in ‘To Live in the Borderlands means You’. The multi-lingual and multi-ethnic background, oppression of borderland has wounded Chicanos but their endurance and suffering pushed them to an existence at the crossroads. This is the path of New Mestiza according to Anzaldua:

The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show how in the flesh and through the images of her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the White race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective thinking is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war (*Borderlands* 102).

The poem 'To Live in the Borderlands' (1987) elucidates the inextricable bond between Anzaldua's culture and mixed identity. Her unflinching belief in multiple identities becomes the guiding principle of her survival in alien land or border land. Anzaldua's intimate history is intertwined with five different races and through her positioning at the crossroads itself is an inclusionary existence between and among different worlds at the same time. The poet successfully articulates the pain of in-betweenness of cultures through two languages- English and Spanish. Judith Butler and Joan Scott cites in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, concepts like "experience" and "identity" enact a "silent violence... as they have operated not merely to marginalize certain groups, but to erase and exclude them from the notion of 'community' altogether," then any invocation of these "foundational" concepts will be seen as always already tainted with exclusionary and totalizing forms of power (xiv)".

The borderland becomes a self-reflection or the awareness of a person who is destined to experience the torrential of the rifts within borders. The real-life testimonials of persons occupying the space between multi-ethnic worlds luminate the experiences of oscillating to and forth, undergoing spatial, geographical and psychological shortcomings. Intersection of Mexican and American culture placed Anzaldua within the borders of these countries and she calls it as a land of chaos where "you fight hard to resist" (316). Borderlands or Frontier identity is a fluid one that switches between inner and outer realm that is in constant contact with the search for identity. Anzaldua's notion of borderland identity give birth to a new culture; an inclusionary and intersectional at times with a transformative vision to empower the humanity.

The poem exhorts Anzaldua's unbreakable or undeniable reliance and intermingling with her culture and hybrid identity. The cultural landscape of diverse identities pushes her to the premise that survival becomes easy and comfortable in the borderlands due to mixed race. Anzaldua clearly explicates about her lineage with five diverse races and how it closely becomes an associating link with her personal history. The poem brings forth the concept of inclusion which holds high of different cultures and the presence of crossroads evade monistic perception of a single place/ culture/religion/language. The parallel existence of dual cultures in the context of borderlands is envisaged through Spanish and English languages. She further describes the painful experience in this passage "Chicanas feel uncomfortable talking in Spanish to Latinas, afraid of their censure . . . Often with mexicanas y latinas we'll speak English as a neutral language.

Yet, at the same time, we're afraid the other will think we're agringadas because we don't speak Chicano Spanish (Anzaldúa). The inhabitants of the borderlands transcend the usual definition or classification of people as "hispana" or "mestiza" or "mulata". The inner strife of a person with blended race hyphenates identity crisis.

caught in the crossfire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back
not knowing which side to turn to, run from (3-5).

The sacredness of heritage is bestowed not with a discrimination between blackness or whiteness. For Anzaldua the shadowing process of her lineage aggravates exclusion of her identity by the mainstream society. The speaker feels insulted on her mixed race when she has been addressed by Mexicans as "rajetas".

that mexicanas call you rajetas,
that denying the Anglo inside you
is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black (9-11)

The concept of life at the border often accompanies the sense of imperfection and incompleteness doubled with jeopardy, hurdles and inadequacy to communicate one's self. Anzaldua states that the terms like "burra" and "buey" degrade individuals and such instances trigger in the formation of a new gender who embodies male and female aspects. The inextricable bond and representation that food has with culture, tradition and identity is specially indicated. The cultural confluence is highlighted by the concept of interconnectedness of one's heritage. Yet the speaker connects the dangers lurking within the labyrinth of

cultural representations. The addiction of the borderland people to drugs and liquor, acts of suicide all suggest the fragmented existence torn between life and death;

Living in the Borderlands means you fight hard to
...the rope crushing the hollow of your throat; (23-26).

Anzaldua also states how borderland sometimes become synonymous with tormented experience and struggle in battlefield between body and soul. Alienation and estrangement of borderland experience push her to a prolonged dilemma. The incessant feeling of loss makes resistance pivotal to tackle the dilemma. The transformative role that the borderland can envisage upon a person and the resultant identity it gifts seem to have gone beyond one's imagination. The adequacy of survival is at the core of Anzaldua's poem and she exhorts her readers to live in an inclusive way by erasing the borders. The challenges and obstacles that the crossroads provide us may be hindering to a farther extent but it always assures the theme of survival at the core:

To survive the Borderlands
you must live sin fronteras
be a crossroads (40-42).

The poem validates the presence of diverse grounded identities for a person who survive in the borderlands. This necessitates switching and crossing from one identity to the next. The concepts like race and racial identity dwindles the privileges of human beings. The hybridization and amalgamation of racial groups heighten the degree of complexities concerning the borders and borderlands. The voices of the writers of Third

World countries are designated as voices from the margin. Spivak has rightly claimed that “when a cultural identity is thrust upon one because the centre wants an unidentifiable margin, claims for marginality assure validation from the centre” (221). For Homi K Bhabha, “human subject is not grounded in a fixed identity but rather is a discursive effect generated in the act of enunciation... It opens the possibility of an international culture of hybridity generated through discursive activity” (qtd. in Bracken 506)

Conclusion

The fullest empowerment comes only through empowering the margins. Mestiza consciousness is characterized by hybridity, flexibility and plurality and it provides for a valid theoretical base for minority literatures. Anzaldua’s poem reconstructs the fragmented identity of women of color who struggle to cope themselves with the strategies of assimilation in Western society. The shifting nature of identity in connection with geography, history and culture transcends the binary thinking and perspectives. Anzaldua’s mission is to interconnect and assimilate the multicultural, multi racial identities diversified by defining ideologies. The people who inhabit this position are the marginalized section and she yearns to bring them to the forefront by evading the binary thinking and through the act of pushing margins to the periphery. Her intersectional strategies call upon the urge to transcend the dominant order by those being inscribed as liminal. She writes “I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am

participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet” (Anzaldua).

Works Cited

- Anzaldua, G. *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Aunt Lute Books, 1999.
- ... “To Live in the Borderlands Means You”. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987, pp. 194-195.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies*. Routledge, 1998.
- Bracken, Christopher. “Postcolonialism”. *Encyclopaedia of Semiotics*. Ed. Paul Bouissac, OUP, 1999.
- Butler, Judith, and Joan Scott. *Introduction. Feminists Theorize the Political*. Routledge, 1992.
- Guerin, Wilfred L. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- María Herrera, Sobek. “Gloria Anzaldua: Place, Race, Language and Sexuality in the Magic Valley”. *PMLA*, vol.121, no.1, 2006.
- Moya, Paul M.L. and Michael R. Hames-Garcia. “Postmodernism, “Realism and the Politics of Identity: Cherrie Moraga and Chicana Feminism”. *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*. Orient Blackswan, 2010.
- Saldívar-Hull, Sonia. “Gloria Anzaldua”. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Paul Lauter (Ed). 2008.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Post-structuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value”. *Literary Theory Today*. Cornell U.P., 1990.
- Warren, Barbara. *The Feminine Image in Literature*. Hayden, 1973.