Chapter-1

Blurring Boundaries: Ethnicity, Multiculturalism and the Hybridized ‘Self’ in the Third Space

A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing (qtd. in the ‘Introduction’ to The Location of Culture)

The desire to answer the age-old question, “Who am I?” is inherent in each and every person. The search for a sense of self/identity, for true knowledge and for truth is written about in coming-of-age novels, autobiographies and in bildungsroman/künstleroman fiction. In The United States of America, a land of immigrants, where a mixing of disparate cultures is imperative, this passion for making a sense of self is all the more evident. The quest for a true knowledge of self and its infinite powers has been pursued from the time of Emerson, Thoreau and others. Theories like ‘melting pot’ (which advocates assimilation, a melting of all cultures to form one acceptable culture) which were the upshot of making sense of the confusion that arises from the polyethic and multivocal condition of American culture, have resulted in reiterating the hegemonic nature of Eurocentric American culture, not taking into consideration the claim of ethnic cultures. Ethnic Americans display a shared preoccupation with identity. For them, as Bella Adams points out, quoting several questions posed by Meena Alexander, “identity is not only a matter of responding to the ‘Who am I?’ but also to a whole series of questions: ‘Where am I? When am I?’ and ‘How did I become what I am? How shall I start to write myself, configure my ‘I’ as Other, image this life I lead, here, now, in
America?” (1). Cultural identity has been experienced very differently in America by the dominant white, heterosexual, Western European immigrants, and by the various non-European minorities or by the Native Americans whose identity has been periodically threatened with assimilation and acculturation. Therefore the work of multiculturalists is needed to reconstruct marginalized experiences and to promote positive representations of ethnic cultures. The publication of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s *Beyond the Melting Pot* paved the way for the revival of American ethnic identification in the 1960s and 1970s when attacks on the melting pot became the battle cry of “unmeltable ethnics” who demanded that attention must be paid to ethnicity and to give up the assimilationist hope that ethnicity was going to disappear. Ethnicity truly was in vogue in the 1970s, even though it was perceived as a new word then. The co-authors of *Beyond the Melting Pot* reported their findings on ethnicity in the introduction to their 1975 *Ethnicity* collection: “Ethnicity seems to be a new term. In the sense in which we use it—the character or quality of an ethnic group—it does not appear in the 1933 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but it makes its appearance in the 1972 Supplement, where the first usage recorded is that of David Riesman in 1953” (1).

Riesman in his *American Scholar* essay looks at “our ethnic diversity, our regional and religious pluralism” (14) as a safeguard against the possibilities of fascism in the United States. The Greek word *ethnikos*, from which the English “ethnic” and “ethnicity” are derived, meant “gentile,” “heathen”. Only in the mid-nineteenth century did the more familiar meaning of “ethnic” as “peculiar to a race or nation” emerge. In his introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), Fredrik Barth sees the essence of
ethnicity in such (mental, cultural, social, moral, aesthetic, and not necessarily territorial) boundary-constructing processes which function as cultural markers between groups. For Barth it is “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (15). In 1922, Max Weber, a German sociologist offered a definition in his ‘What is an Ethnic Group?’: “We shall call ‘ethnic groups’ those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration . . . it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists” (qtd. in Beginning Ethnic American Literatures 3). Ethnicity in that sense demands identification with others who share same experiences or have memories of the same kind. This would imply that ethnic writing is the literature of cultural difference, and this difference is not static or fixed in the past.

The theory of ethnicity has come a long way from Weber’s time. In more recent work, its dynamic, ever-changing nature has been strongly emphasized, especially in Werner Sollors’ studies Beyond Ethnicity (1986) and The Invention of Ethnicity (1989). Sollors gives an example in the latter of how ethnicity is continually re-invented under different historical and political circumstances. He points out that laundry work is always associated with Chinese in America. But, as he says, “The Chinese laundryman does not learn his trade in China; there are no laundries in China . . . One can hardly explain the prevalence of Chinese- American laundries by going back to Chinese history proper” (qtd. in Beginning Ethnic American Literatures 3). Ethnic groups respond to and seek to shape as per new historical and political conditions. Ethnic American writing demands
recognition of the fact that writers belonging to this group are writing for their American lives. Their ethnic background has modified their American lives and they, in turn have modified Euro-centric American culture. As Bob Callahan says in his contribution to the debate “Is Ethnicity Obsolete?”: “America is its Native-American tradition, its Afro-American tradition, its Euro-American tradition, its Asian-American tradition, and its Hispanic-American tradition” (qtd. in Beginning Ethnic American Literatures 5). Each tradition that is identified by the critic harbours many different ethnicities within it. The illusion of unified and homogeneous cultural representation and that of unique ethnic identities are shattered by the ways in which ethnic and American cultural precepts overlap, and by varied concepts on gender and class.

As Maria Lauret points out in the ‘Introduction’ to Beginning Ethnic American Literatures, “ethnic fiction is hardly ever about African American, Native American, Chicano/a2 or Asian American culture per se, but about the hybridity that is inscribed in their very designation” (8). Ethnic American writers find themselves in a multicultural situation which is often dramatized in their fiction by protagonists who are of mixed ancestry and who thus literally embody that hybridity in themselves. There is a tendency among them to write against history and against the racism and ethnocentrism which characterizes it. This writing against history is often done in autobiographical forms and in bildungsroman/ kunstleroman fiction. Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man (1952), Carlos Bulosan’s America is in the Heart (1943) and Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987) all insist on the importance of their historical experience and on the hybridized nature of their identity.
Much of ethnic American literature is preoccupied with the desire to make sense of self, more so, because of the confusion that arises due to the influence of disparate cultures on one’s identity. Words like ‘authenticity’ and ‘essentialism’ are to be dispensed with when analyzing the work of an ethnic American writer even though the term ‘ethnicity’ itself assumes narrow conceptions of a pure and authentic self. The study of Ethnic American literature concentrates on the multiple voices which increasingly dominate America-Jewish Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans and others with attendant theories of identity and multiculturalism. For American ethnic identity, and the literary work to which it gives rise, almost of necessity involves multifarious kinds and degrees of voice, reflective of the multiplicity of cultures in America.

Multiculturalism is useful for the study of ethnic diversity and cultural pluralism of America and its literature. Multiculturalism denotes either some mode of interrelationship between the cultures of two or more countries, or the multiple cultural identities within the borders of a single nation. It denies the existence of a pure culture or cultural tradition in any society. Speaking on the hybrid nature of the empire, in his significant work, *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said expresses the view, “Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another, none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic”(xxv). Theories proposed by critics like Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, etc. stress the hybridized nature of post-colonial societies and the idea of polyphony of voices in these societies. Multiculturalism envisions a society in which members of different ethnic groups co-
exist together, influence and be influenced by others, and at the same time retain remnants of their ethnic identity. Multiculturalists stand for a healthy pluralism that insists on tolerance and respect.

America and its literature with its long list of ethnic minorities such as, Native Americans, Black Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, etc. cannot but be multicultural. Since the 1960s, there has been nothing short of a literary Renaissance of Black, Native, Latino/a and Asian American writing, leading to a better understanding of America’s cultural diversity. Accepting the voices of the minorities is imperative for America and its survival. As Ishmael Reed points out in an interview with Mel Watkins, “Those who have incorporated other perspectives and allowed their vision to embrace other ways of looking at the world have a better chance of surviving” (qtd. in Multicultural American Literature 6). Meena Alexander’s words in The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience (1996) echo the same idea when she says that ethnicity provides ‘multiple anchorages’ helping her to become what she wants:

In our multiple ethnicities as Asian Americans, we are constantly making alliances, both within and outside our many communities. In order to make up my ethnic identity as an Indian American, I learn from Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Chinese Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, Jewish Americans, Arab Americans. And these images that slip and slide out of my own mind jostle against a larger shared truth. And my artwork refracts these lines of sense, these multiple anchorages (128).
What she stresses here is the impossibility of keeping the ethnic identity pure, unified and homogeneous. The works of the minority writers are hardly ever about their ethnic groups but about the hybridity that is inscribed in their very designation. As pointed out by Ishmael Reed, “I began to realize that being black or Chicano or Native American, you are forced to see and become aware of disparate cultures. We had to become multicultural” (qtd. in Multicultural American Literature 1).

‘Melting pot’ theory has been challenged by multiculturalists who consider it a cover for oppressive assimilation. To them the only way you can melt in the pot is by assimilating- becoming similar to the dominant or ‘hegemonic’ white culture. Multiculturalism is a movement that insists that American society has never been white, but always in fact multiracial and diverse. It seeks to preserve distinctly different, ethnic, racial, or cultural communities without melting them into a common culture. Here the common culture is seen as white supremacy, a culture of bigotry and discrimination. Multiculturalism emphasizes on the separate characteristics and virtues of particular cultural groups.

However culturally distinct these different groups may be, they are held together by common themes and by modes of representation which highlight the tensions inherent in American national identity. Their protagonists are of mixed ancestry and they literally embody the hybridity within themselves. Folklore, myth and narratives originating in a community’s oral tradition are profusely referred to as a means of preserving cultural
heritage. At the same time these writers have modified the myths and folklore in keeping with the new environment in which they are living. Mixing of genres and forms and even languages is another feature which is common to multicultural writing. Frequently, forms of autobiography and fiction are mixed, prose is ladled with poetry and song, narrative is also [counter-] historiography. Linguistic mixtures occur, especially in the bilingual texts of Chicano/a writers and also when African American writers make use of the black vernacular as their native language, or when Asian Americans and Native Americans intersperse their English with words and phrases from their first language.

Multiculturalists uphold their particular cultures and heritages and at the same time, are aware of the composite nature of their cultures, its heterogeneity. They agree with Ishmael Reed’s view that Americans have ‘a better chance of surviving’ the more they become aware of their plural legacies. He argues that affording ethnic America better recognition with all its history and diversity of voice is not to be thought of as a source of division. He feels that this would help usher in an even more textured, and so even more durable, national identity. Multicultural writers have multiple sources, multiple anchorages to draw upon, to rely. This multiplicity of vision is stressed upon in the works of Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans who have knowledge of their own ethnic histories and cultures as well as that of European and American culture. Ralph Ellison, Scot Momaday, Rudolfo Anaya, Maxine Hong Kingston, Toni Morrison, Louise Erdrich, Rolando Hinojosa, Amy Tan, Sandra Cisneros are some of the major ethnic writers of America who have drawn from the Afro-America of Harlem and Dixie, the Native America of Jemez Publo reservation, the chicanismo of
New Mexico, and the ‘Gold Mountain’ Chinese America of San Francisco and voiced the ethnic plurality of cultures. These writers hold differences between individuals and groups to be a potential source of strength rather than discord. It is just as Ralph Ellison declares in the Epilogue to his *Invisible Man*, “Our fate is to become one, and yet many. This is not a prophecy, but description” (465). At the centre of American Multicultural fiction lies this ‘one and yet many’ principle. Multicultural literature stands for what the unnamed protagonist in this novel says, “Whence this passion towards conformity anyway? - diversity is the word. Let man keep his many parts and you will have no tyrant state” (466). The multicultural texts are remarkable for the way the writers incorporate their particular ethnic groups’ own music, myths, history, art and different kinds of script and that of the western High Canon. Both legacies are made use of, by these writers to the best of their advantage. Multicultural environments force each ethnic group to balance a duality and negotiate the distance.

The study of multifaceted ethnic and minority identities in US fiction is of a fascinating and absorbing nature. Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and *China Men* (1980) and Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* (1984) and *Caramelo* (2002) are closely analyzed in the thesis, as they offer the opportunity to discover how these ethnic writers come to terms with the fluid nature of their identity and how they keep on evolving themselves into something new in a ‘third space’ as visualized by Homi K. Bhabha, a leading figure in contemporary post-colonial and cultural discourse. His theory of cultural hybridity fosters the larger goal of multiculturalism while acknowledging cultural differences. For Bhabha, “political
empowerment, and the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause, comes from posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective” (The Location of Culture 4). Those who are aware of the danger of co-option that confronts multiculturalism in the current hyper consumerist culture, acknowledge Bhabha’s precept of Third Space as of great importance.

Works of Kingston (1940- ) and Cisneros (1954- ) are selected for their multiplicity of experiences which help them to arrive at a sense of self, which is hybridized in nature. The realization of the futility of confining the ‘self’ within boundaries defined by certain cultural and gender norms, set by both ethnic communities and the dominant American society, has resulted in an effective resistance towards generic conventions in the works of Kingston and Cisneros. These two ethnic American writers critically negotiate in their literary texts the impact of ‘straddling two cultures’, specifically when reversing binary oppositions for the purpose of self-empowerment. The thesis attempts to study the way in which rigid concepts of gender, culture and genre have been broken down in their search for a viable sense of identity. The concepts of gender, culture and the resistance towards generic conventions are the paradigms chosen for an in-depth analysis of the selected works of Kingston and Cisneros.

To the word ‘culture’ Raymond Williams, the Welsh cultural theorist, attached four important meanings: “an individual habit of mind; the state of intellectual development of a whole society; the arts; and the whole way of life of a group or people” (qtd. in Contemporary Cultural Theory 2). These four usages of culture denote that an
individual’s identity is determined by the society or the group to which he/she belongs. Kingston and Cisneros deny the stereotypical images of Asian and Chicano/a identities determined by their ethnic cultural codes and as was anticipated by dominant culture. They refuse to confine themselves within boundaries drawn by others. Boundaries blur as they fight over cultural prejudices. Both inter- and intracultural understanding should be taken into account when analyzing the works of these ethnic writers. ‘Intracultural’ means within their own cultures, that is, Chinese and Chicano/a cultures. ‘Intercultural’ is about how they relate with the dominant white culture. This dichotomous view is considered when making a study of their growth, using the parameter of culture, into a consciousness of their hybridized identities.

Several attempts have been made by feminists to prove that the concept of gender is clearly a social construct. The concept of gender is usually placed in opposition to the concept of ‘sex’. While sex is a matter of biology, gender (feminine/masculine) is a matter of performativity. It “may therefore be taken to refer to learned patterns of behaviour and action, as opposed to that which is biologically determined” (Edgar et al. 158). Gender being largely the creation of society, continuous efforts have been made to disassemble the accepted meanings of gender identity. Speaking on gender identity in Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity, Robert J.Stoller says,[it]

starts with the knowledge and awareness, whether conscious or unconscious, that one belongs to one sex and not the other, though as one develops, gender identity becomes much more complicated, so that, for
example, one may sense himself as not a male but a masculine man or an effeminate or even as a man who fantasies being a woman (qtd. in *Genders* xxi)

Kingston and Cisneros defy margins of gender identity drawn by others in search of a true sense of self. They reject set patterns of gender identity drawn by both their ethnic cultures and the dominant culture. They refuse to be turned into American feminine or to embrace the concept of femininity ascribed by ethnic cultures.

In their refusal to accept cultural and gender identities imposed upon them, they invent new forms of telling stories. They break generic conventions in their pursuit of the self. The narrative strategies adopted by Kingston and Cisneros challenge the generic models of the bildungsroman, alongside the historical novel, autobiography and other salient genres. As Jelena Šesnić points out, “the new meanings they [ethnic women writers] couch in these well-known forms amount to challenging the presumptive norms of representing gender, race, and the nation” (85). By locating gender and culture in their manipulations of genre and mythology and looking at the gendered categorization of generic forms, readers can also discover the hybridized nature of their identity/selfhood in their conception of gender, culture and genre. The resistance shown towards acceptable generic conventions reveals the ambivalent state of their identity. As Kingston and Cisneros belong to two different branches of ethnic American literature, I would concentrate on positioning them in their respective fields,
that is, in Asian American literature and Chicano literature. I would also chalk out the backdrop which strengthened them and turned them into empowered writers.

Asian American literature focuses on depicting realistic pictures of Asian Americans with roots in China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh etc. Even the early Asian American writers (from 1880s-1920s) offered more realistic ways of looking at themselves and their experiences than those provided by the sensationalized depictions of Asianness that were otherwise circulating in American culture. This commitment to realism was evident in the works of many early writers publishing autobiographies or semi-autobiographies. For example, the first Asian American literary text *When I Was a Boy in China* by Yan Phou Lee published in 1887 was autobiographical in form and aimed to correct false impressions and ideas in America concerning Chinese people. Other autobiographies and semi-autobiographies which followed were written from a position of educational and professional privilege completely ignoring the harsh conditions of working-class life both in Asia and the USA. The poems written during this period tend to adhere to popular forms of classical Chinese poetry, as well as realistically describing harsh immigration experiences.

Autobiography continues to be an important form in the next phase (1930s-50s) not only for the students and professionals but also for writers belonging to working class background. Among the writers published during this period Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950), Pardee Lowe’s *Father and Glorious Descendent* (1943) and Chin Yang Lee’s *Flower Drum Song* (1957) were criticized for adhering to white racist
stereotypes. It is in this period some writers have come up with pictures of socialist possibilities for the USA through interracial alliances between workers. The internment of Japanese immigrants after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in December 1941 resulted in the publication of several works. Among them, Hisaye Yamamoto’s short story *Death Rides the Rails to Poston* (1942), Monica Sone’s autobiography *Nisei Daughter* (1953) and John Okada’s Bildungsroman *No-No Boy* (1957) are noteworthy.

Writers of 1960s-1970s combined popular American forms like cowboy and kung fu films with Asian ballads, operas, folk tales and children’s stories. Frank Chin with his co-editors, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada and Shawn Hsu Wong published *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1974), the first anthology of Asian American writing in the US, which included excerpts from some of the earlier texts and also examples of literary writing from both their contemporaries and themselves. Frank Chin accused certain Asian American writers of racism in their apparently uncritical support of white supremacy. He was severely critical of Christianized Chinese American autobiographers from Yung Wing and Jade Snow Wong to Maxine Hong Kingston: “Our anthology is exclusively Asian American . . . Asia America, so long ignored and forcibly excluded from creative participation in American culture, is wounded, sad, angry, swearing, and wondering, and this is his AIIEEEEE!!! It is more than a whine, shout, or scream. It is fifty years of our whole voice” (qtd. in *Asian American Literature* 14).
The literary forms most suited to articulating this, according to him were ‘raging satires, polemic and slapstick comedies’, not ‘confession, autobiography, conversion’ (qtd. in *Asian American Literature* 14). In addition to protesting against sex, gender and racial hierarchies in and beyond the USA, Asian American writers embarked on an interracial ‘pen war’, mainly divided along gender lines and mainly involving Chin and Kingston. In general, Asian American feminists pointed out that there were not many options to be Asian American since the *Aiiieee!* group’s ideal included only heterosexual, Chinese or Japanese American, and English-speaking male. The representativeness of this ideal was also challenged by the demographic changes brought by the 1965 Immigration Act, particularly in terms of immigrants and refugees from South and Southeast Asia.

In the 1980s, Asian America shifted from a predominantly American-born to a predominantly foreign-born population, necessitating an acknowledgement of their heterogeneity. Such diversity denotes that Asian America was caught between worlds due to ties with different classes. Literary texts by Maxine Hong Kingston, David Henry Hwang, Amy Tan, Wendy Law-Yone, Bharati Mukherjee and Chang-rae Lee tried to capture this sentiment. Asian American literature now included not only immigrant narratives but also refugee literatures by and about Southeast Asians. Such diversity generated a crisis in representation. Asian America appeared to be divided against itself in terms of ethnic studies versus postcolonial studies. Ranjini Srikanth comments:
Postcolonial studies require an understanding of the global forces of neocolonialism and global capitalism that affect any single nation’s economic, political, and social realities. Ethnic studies, while acknowledging the importance of understanding the forces at play beyond U.S. borders is based on the idea that what is ultimately important is the reality within the nation state: the condition of people of color, the resources denied them, the opportunities withheld (qtd. in *Asian American Literature* 16).

While some Asian Americans, most notably Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, identify with ethnic studies, other Asian American critics, including Ajaz Ahmed, Arjun Appadurai, Homi Bhabha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Sara Suleri are identified with postcolonial studies. Some Asian Americans identify with both labels, like Meena Alexander, for example, using ‘ethnic’ in *Fault Lines* and ‘postcolonial’ in *The Shock of Arrival* (1996). Norms are transgressed through an increased emphasis on multiculturalism within and beyond Asian America with respect to gender, cultural identity and genre. Each and every Asian American writer seems to go beyond margins of all labels and refuse to be put under just one label.

The self-preoccupied prose narratives, most notably American autobiographies and bildungsroman have greatly influenced these Asian American writers. Traditionally, both forms focus on the personal development of a character, in autobiography a real character, and in the Bildungsroman a fictional character, as s/he struggles to understand self and world. The most widely taught Asian American prose also tends to be
autobiographical. As pointed out in the introduction to *The Big Aiiieeeeee!* (1991): ‘Every Chinese American book ever published in . . . America by a major publisher has been a Christian autobiography or autobiographical novel’ (qtd. in *Asian American Literature* 18), from Maxine Hong Kingston’s works to Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and her family sagas as well. Chin and his co-editors argue that autobiographical texts are published because they seem to fully approve that very American project of self-redefinition:

Chinese American ventriloquizing the same old white Christian Fantasy of little Chinese victims of ‘the original sin of being born to a brutish, Sadomasochistic culture of cruelty and victimization’ fleeing to America in search of freedom from everything Chinese and seeking white acceptance, and of being victimized by stupid white racists and then being reborn in acculturation and honorary whiteness (qtd. in *Asian American Literature* 18).

Chin and his supporters vilified Kingston, Amy Tan and others who followed genres related to autobiography and life-writing, accusing them of imitating the national literary canon of American literature. Kingston who refuses to be categorized, does not want to be labeled either as a feminist writer or a Chinese / American writer. At the same time she acknowledges the hold both Chinese and American cultures have on her. Kingston and other well known Asian American writers have successfully straddled both their ethnic culture and the dominant American culture. They acknowledge the hybridity that is inscribed within their selves.
Maxine Ting Ting Hong Kingston, one of the selected authors in this thesis, was born to Chinese immigrant parents, Tom Hong and Chew Ying Lan, in Stockton, California, on 27 October 1940. Her American name, Maxine, was after a blonde who was always lucky in gambling. Ting Ting, her Chinese name, comes from a Chinese poem about self-reliance. The eldest of the six Hong children, Kingston had two older siblings who died in China years before her mother came to the United States. Kingston recalls the early part of her school education as her “silent years” in which she had a terrible time talking. Later Maxine, who flunked kindergarten, became a straight-A student and won a scholarship to the University of California, Berkeley. In 1962 she got her bachelor’s degree in English and married Earll Kingston, a Berkeley graduate and an actor. She returned to the university in 1964, earned a teaching certificate in 1965, and taught English and Mathematics from 1965 to 1967 in Hayward, California. During their time at Berkeley, the Kingstons were involved in the antiwar movement on campus. In 1967 they decided to leave the country because the movement was getting more and more violent, and their friends were too involved in drugs. On their way to Japan the Kingstons stopped in Hawaii and stayed there for seventeen years.

At first Kingston taught language, arts and English as a second language in a private school. After the publication of her first book *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976), she became a visiting professor at the University of Hawaii at Honolulu. A few days after she finished the final revisions of *China Men* (1980), a Honolulu Buddhist sect claimed Kingston as a “Living Treasure of Hawaii.”
Kingston herself, however, was still looking homeward, having always felt like a stranger in the islands. She and her husband moved back to California, while their son, Joseph, stayed in Hawaii and became a musician. In 1992 Kingston became a member of the Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Kingston’s writing depends greatly on memory and imagination. The major sources of Kingston’s memory and imagination are her mother’s stories and her father’s silence. Kingston’s father, Tom Hong, was a scholar trained in traditional Chinese classics and a teacher in New Society Village before his immigration. In the United States he washed windows until he had saved enough money to start a laundry in New York with three of his friends. Later, Hong was cheated out of his share of the partnership. He moved with his pregnant wife to Stockton and started managing an illegal gambling house for a wealthy Chinese American. A major part of his work, besides taking care of the club, was to get arrested. When the gambling house was shut down, he started his own laundry and a new life for himself and his family in America.

Brave Orchid, Kingston’s practical mother, was a doctor who practiced Western medicine and midwifery in China. She did not join her husband in New York until 1940, fifteen years after they had parted. In America, Brave Orchid exchanged her professional status for that of a laundry woman, cleaning maid, tomato picker, and cannery worker. Undaunted by the difficulties in her life, this “champion talker” educated her children with “talk Stories,” which included myth, legend, family history, and ghost tales. “Night after night my mother would talk-story until we fell asleep. I could not tell where the
stories left off and the dreams began” (19), Kingston recalls in *The Woman Warrior*. Through her talk-stories Brave Orchid extended Chinese tradition into the lives of her American children and enriched their imagination. Yet Kingston is also aware of the fact that the mother’s talking stories were double-edged: “She said I would grow up a wife and slave, but she taught me the song of the woman warrior, Fa Mu Lan” (20), Kingston recollects in *The Woman Warrior*. While Brave Orchid’s storytelling was educational, it also reiterated patriarchal and misogynistic messages of traditional Chinese culture. Moreover, as in traditional Chinese education, Brave Orchid did not explain her stories. Kingston needed to interpret her mother’s stories and become a storyteller herself.

Her community also played a decisive role in Kingston’s writing. Comparing herself to Toni Morrison and Leslie Silko, Kingston argues that what makes their writings vivid and alive is their connection with community and tribe. Yet Kingston refuses to be “representative” of Chinese Americans. “Stockton Chinese is not the same as a San Francisco Chinese,” Kingston stated in an interview with Arturo Islas. Unlike “the Big City”(San Francisco) and the “the Second City”(Sacramento), Stockton, a city in the Central Valley of California, has a relatively small Chinese population. At most the Stockton Chinese American community is a minor subculture of Chinese America. Yet Stockton became a “literary microcosm” for Kingston, whose knowledge of China derives from its people. And the language spoken in this community, a Cantonese dialect called Say Yup, supplies Kingston with distinctive sounds and rhythms. What Kingston has done in her writing is to translate the oral tradition of her community into a written one. Moreover, the physical environment and social class in which Kingston grew up
played an important role in her “education” as writer. Kingston spent her childhood on the south side of Stockton, an area populated by mostly working-class and unemployed people of mixed races. The “burglar Ghosts,” “Hobo Ghosts,” and “Wino Ghosts” that crowded young Maxine’s childhood memory testify to the importance of street wisdom and survival skills. Kingston insists on the audiotape *Maxine Hong Kingston: Talking Story* (1990) that had she been born in a middle-class suburb, her struggle to be a writer would have been harder.

Kingston’s oeuvre covers a range of genres coming out of a powerful literary imagination. She integrates autobiographical elements with Asian legend and fictionalized history to delineate cultural conflicts confronting Americans of Chinese descent. Frequently studied in a variety of academic disciplines, her works bridge two civilizations in their examination of social and familial bonds from ancient China to contemporary California. Her first book *The Woman Warrior* is a personal, unconventional work that seeks to reconcile Eastern and Western conceptions of cultural and gender identity. Kingston shuns chronological plot and standard nonfiction techniques in her memoir, synthesizing ancient myth and imaginative biography to present a kaleidoscopic vision of a female character.

In *The Woman Warrior*, one of the works chosen in this thesis, the protagonist, Maxine is torn between dual concepts of identity she derives from her ancestral Chinese/Cantonese culture and the American culture of her upbringing imbibed while living in Stockton, California. The text is split into five stories, each episode tracking Kingston's
theme of the growth of the young girl into maturity and the seminal influences that gradually led her to it. Each section relates the story of a particular woman who is formative in the narrator's life. The opening story, titled ‘No Name Woman’ begins with an injunction to silence: 'You must not tell anyone' (WW 3), Kingston's mother warns her, before going on to recount the true story of Kingston's aunt's illegitimate pregnancy, shame and eventual suicide. Her story is told to the young narrator by her mother as a cautionary tale: it is both a warning not to humiliate her parents, by becoming pregnant herself, but also, and more importantly, it serves as an injunction against passing on this story of familial shame. Whenever she had to warn her children about life, she told stories like this, “a story to grow upon” (WW 5). Maxine’s mother orders her not to “tell anyone you had an aunt. Your father does not want to hear her name. She has never been born” (WW 15). Rather than obeying her mother, the young Kingston tells her aunt's tale for she feels that by not telling, she is actually participating in the crime meted out to her by her family. She understands that the real punishment was not the ruthless raid carried out by the villagers in order to punish the girl and the family, but the family’s deliberately forgetting her.

The second story, ‘White Tigers’ introduces the no name woman's counterpart in the text, the mythical and legendary character of Fa Mu Lan, or the woman warrior. The narrator's mother, Brave Orchid tells this story with vivid details of how she avenges the wrongs done to her family and fellow villagers. All her adventures are narrated by Fa Mu Lan herself in the first person. This strategy accentuates the young girl's heightened identification with her heroine. The Fa Mu Lan story is immediately juxtaposed by
Kingston with this comment on the narrator's own life: 'My American life has been such a disappointment' (WW 45). By connecting the young girl's life to that of Fa Mu Lan at this moment, Kingston shifts the narrative perspective from a mythical mode focusing upon the woman warrior to that of her mother, Brave Orchid.

'Shaman', the third section of the novel, deals with Brave Orchid's life. As a pioneering doctor in China, an expert cook, a capable exorcist and a hard labourer in her laundry in America, Brave Orchid herself functions as a model of female strength and accomplishment. The narrator herself pieces together her mother's history by sifting through the textual fragments that she discovers: Brave Orchid's medical diploma, graduation photographs and photographs of her father. Although this material is partly supplemented by Brave Orchid's stories about her life, the narrator is left to imaginatively reconstruct the missing sections of her mother's life. In fact, all of the narrator's experiences of China, including mythical narratives, and even her knowledge of her relatives and ancestors in China gleaned from letters to her parents have fired her imagination. Towards the end of the section we find her of having come to terms with the dichotomy of life carved out by this ancestry which is sometimes fabulous but at times unacceptable, and the kind of existence and values she embraces in America.

The fourth section, 'At the Western Palace', continues the narrator's exploration of her mother's life, but shifts the focus to America. Readers are introduced to the narrator's aunt, Moon Orchid, who comes to stay with her sister. As the complete antithesis of her sister, Moon Orchid is a frail and anxious woman, with little personality of her own.
Once ensconced in her sister's house, she takes to trailing after her nephews and nieces (the narrator included), and verbally echoing their actions and movements. Moon Orchid's flimsy appearance and frailty of personality are reflected in the arrival gift that she presents to Maxine: a paper cutout of Fa Mu Lan. Whereas her sister gives the young girl tangible role models to aspire for, Moon Orchid is able only to offer fragile paper figures. This inefficacy continues when Moon Orchid fails to live up to her sister's expectations of her existence in America, and slides into insanity. Moon Orchid fails to create a third space for herself. She is incapable of ‘straddling two cultures’ as her niece succeeds in doing.

The final section, 'A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe', unites the previous sections, weaving together the narratives of mother and daughter. This is particularly apparent in relation to a speech-silence dichotomy. Kingston has already charted the narrator's ambivalence and occasional hostility towards her mother tongue, as well as her attempts to escape it. She struggles to escape from a stifling maternal influence. Partly this desire for dissociation from the mother tongue is due to the embarrassment she feels at her parents’ inability to speak in English. For the narrator, her mother’s poor English increases her humiliation at school: her taciturnity causes her teachers to seek parental involvement, only to discover that 'my parents did not understand English' (WW 165). The young Maxine's hostility also results from Brave Orchid's attempts to press her language knowledge into profitable service. Repeatedly, Maxine's humiliation is accentuated by her mother's insistence that she acts as translator. Yet for the young girl, this maternal pressure paradoxically results in silencing or mangling her speech. Brave
Orchid’s instructions, 'You just translate', preclude the young girl from doing so effectively, and her speech becomes warped. Gradually, the young Maxine moves away from regarding Brave Orchid and her language as negative. This trajectory is engendered by a recognition on the daughter’s part that her mother's language is actually more similar to her own than she had realized. Maxine's realization is that the mother tongue is not actually Chinese; rather it is a mixture of Chinese and American and it is this mixed, hybrid discourse that becomes the language of mother-daughter communication. A recognition of this shared lexicon, and the decision to speak - and of course later to write - completes the move towards resolution between mother and daughter, so that ending her fictional autobiography, Kingston is able to say, “it translated well”(WW 209).

In Kingston’s second memoir, China Men (1980), the other work taken up for analysis in this thesis, almost the same techniques are applied to the plight of the immigrant male. This book won her a National Book Critics Circle Award and an American Book Award. Kingston’s second book was written due to her desire to tell her male ancestors’ stories and it forms a kind of sequel to The Woman Warrior. She has closely followed the structure and technique of The Woman Warrior in telling the stories of her male line of ancestors, which she has termed as ‘biographical novel’. As she admits, this novel is an attempt “to tell the story of a culture of story-tellers”. The first story, 'The Father from China', is told from the young protagonist Maxine’s perspective, and tracks her struggle to discover her father’s history, especially the means by which he emigrated to the United States. This confusion arose as a result of his refusal to talk. He is silent about his past adventures. He either stowed away on a ship from Cuba or he
passed the immigration tests at Angel Island. She remembers that her father could be a pleasant and happy man, and she recalls a few specific occasions when they had fun together as a family. However, far more often her father had been a sour and angry man. He constantly used vulgar and abusive language and usually frowned and scowled as he worked. The narrator's father never talked much about his pre-immigrant life in China, so the information that will be presented is a mix of facts, innuendo, reasoning, and imagination. In spite of his silence, she manages to dig up stories of her male ancestors. This venture is carried out for the sake of arriving at a true sense of her ‘self’. As she asks her father in China Men, “Do you mean to give us a chance at being real Americans by forgetting the Chinese past?” (18).

Kingston’s second chapter, 'The Great Grandfather of Sandalwood Mountains' shifts focus from the continental United States to consider another significant immigration route for early Chinese Americans, to Hawai‘i. Here the two great grandfathers work on a sugar cane plantation in the 1850s, a common occupation for early Chinese immigrants to Hawai‘i. Kingston documents both the hardships and the racism these men endured including the white plantation overseers' tax against talking, and the difficulties the Chinese immigrants experienced in trying to migrate to the mainland U.S. The following section ‘The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains’, works together with the Hawai‘i section in recording the lives and livelihoods of Chinese immigrants on the mainland in the 1850s and 1860s. The author, born in 1940, in Stockton, California, near a railroad line imagines the line is part of the one laid down by her grandfather. Eventually, the railroad stops using the line and takes up the steel tracks.
The local Stockton residents gradually carry away remnants of the railroad to use in landscaping and other projects. The author's paternal grandfather, Ah Goong, is featured in several photographs that hang on the house walls. He usually appears slightly disoriented and is generally photographed alone, frowning. Ah Goong was known to be a little crazy, and the author insinuates, his mental condition may well have been the result of receiving a Japanese bayonet thrust to the head, though specific details are not provided. Here we find the 'railroad grandfather', whose work was to hack away at the Sierra granite to carve a space for the Central Pacific Transcontinental Railroad to pass from west to east. Several themes from the preceding section provide continuity between the two chapters. The image of fire that was introduced via the burning of sugar cane in the Sandalwood Mountains chapter resurfaces here as dynamite explosions in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The plantation employers’ aggression is echoed here in the railroad bosses' suppression of the Chinese American workers' strike for better pay and conditions.

She relates the story of Say Goong and Sahm Goong (Third and Fourth Grandfathers), 'Mad Sao' (the Big Brother), Kau Goong (the ex-river pirate), Uncle Bun (the Communist uncle) and I Fu (Aunt's Husband), via her own reminiscences of each character and the family lore about each that she inherits by way of oft-told family stories. Say Goong and Sahm Goong, two younger brothers of Ah Goong, live in a house in Stockton. The author remembers visiting her grandfathers' house. In the yard is an enormous pile of horse manure that amazes the family and neighbours. The manure is a topic of admiration and discussion, and the grandfathers portion it out to visitors as an
esteemed gift. The grandfathers' house has a stable, where two huge black horses are kept. The grandfathers sell vegetables from a cart drawn by the horses. After some time, Say Goong dies and his ghost begins to visit Sahm Goong. The ghost of Say Goong is silent but persistent. Sahm Goong wonders what Say Goong wants to do or say. After some time, Sahm Goong takes the advice of the author's mother and orders the spirit to go back home.

Kingston's next historical section, 'The American Father’, takes the reader to her own childhood, and the reminiscences she has of her own father, BaBa. Her China Men is composed against the background of her father’s silence. Kingston writes to her father: “You say with the few words and the silences: No stories. No past. No China” (14). For her, China is a country she made up within an American context, along with her history and her family mythology. She dramatizes her ancestors’ memory in a grand style by transliterating the ‘oral history’ into a cultural epic.

The final piece, ‘The Brother in Vietnam’ chronicles Kingston's brother's experiences as a soldier conscripted in the Vietnam conflict, and thereby completes the text's journey from the 1860s to the 1960s. In her plans for the book, Kingston notes that she wanted the narrator to disappear in this chapter again, to allow for the viewpoint of the brother to dominate, a strategy intended to underscore both the conflicting allegiances with which he was faced, and his psychological turmoil as a 'Berkeley pacifist' forced to go to war: “He has to decide whether to be drafted, to try for conscientious objector status, or to go to Canada. The Asian American going to fight in Asia is our worst nightmare” she observed. Despite his evasive manoeuvres, he is sent to Vietnam, but he
emerges unscathed, his principles intact, and most importantly, the one good thing he gets out of Vietnam is the confirmation that the family is really ‘American', an appropriate note on which to end the narrative. When his mother says, “You’re back home”( CM 296), it’s a confirmation of his own understanding and acceptance of his American identity. This exploration of her male line of ancestors is conducted by Kingston to make America acknowledge the contribution made by Chinese Americans in the nation building process and also to claim America not only for them but also for her. By sifting through these stories, she understands the ethnic part of her ‘self’ at the same time the American side of her personality.

After successfully bringing out two biographical novels (to borrow Kingston’s term), she published a collection of essays on Hawai’i, Hawai’i One Summer (1987). Kingston analyzes contemporary social and artistic values in her next novel, Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book (1989), a portrait of a fifth generation Chinese-American Berkeley graduate whose picaresque adventures as a dramatist in California’s 1960s counterculture reflect Kingston’s own experience. Next she published an interesting book about her attempts to be a poet with a comparison between the craft of a fiction writer and a poet, To Be the Poet (2002). Another mixed genre volume, The Fifth Book of Peace was published in 2003 which in presentation and thematic content echoed The Woman Warrior and China Men. She has also edited a volume of writings by war veterans, Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace (2006).
Chicano/a literature, just as Asian American literature, is an important branch of Ethnic American literature. Chicano/a literature came into prominence in the United States during the 1960s, when Chicano/as fought alongside other minorities for just and equal treatment in society. The early literature of the movement was characterized by deep interest in the indigenous knowledge and culture of Chicano/as, looking into the ancient past for the roots that would inform modern Chicano/a identity. La Raza (an important Chicano/a activist group) sought to shape and solidify a national and cultural identity based on the history of the Aztec³ people and their legendary homeland, Aztlán⁴. The surge of literary activity among Chicano/a authors in the 1960s and 1970s became known as the Florecimiento, or Renaissance. The writers of this period paid particular attention to uphold the concept of a unique or authentic identity based on their cultural roots.

The 1980s and beyond have been characterized by a new generation of Chicano/a writers and a different ideology associated with the movement. Contemporary Chicano/a literature is marked by political, economic, and gender diversity. Whereas the earlier literature focused on traits that Chicano/as hold in common, writers have more recently chosen to accentuate diversity among Chicano/as. While scholars of the previous period point out the role of Anglo colonialism in repressing Chicano/a culture and literature, writers of the later period insist on acknowledging that Chicano/as were and are part of that same Anglo culture. There has been an effort among contemporary Chicano/a writers to broaden the borders of Chicano/a literature through greater self-consciousness about the formation of their identity and through the examination of what had been excluded in
the earlier literary Chicano/a paradigm, or even lost as a result of the drive to present a consistent Chicano/a identity. Such contemporary writers as Richard Rodriguez, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa have played key roles by problematizing themes that have long been considered staples in Chicano/a literature and by emphasizing individualism and the notion of Chicano/a life and identity as shaped by multiple cultures that coexist alongside each other.

Since the late 1960s Chicano/studies have unraveled the questions that kept a historic ethnic community marginal. Today the focus of Chicano/a studies is in revealing the history of this community on its own complicated internal terms, not simply terms which suggest an oppositional relationship to Anglo America. In the late 1960s and 1970s there was a tendency among writers to fall into traps of essentializing paradigms, especially the concept of a unique pure identity and that of a national and cultural identity. They tried to bring about a cultural unity, to create a cultural nationalist voice. Cultural nationalism became just another name for political activism. In the 1980s certain Chicano/a writers problematized such themes and issues and emphasized individualism and the notion of a Chicano/a identity moulded by multiple cultures. There is a concentrated effort among scholars to understand culture as fluid with regard to race, class, gender, sexuality, and political affiliations. The ten-year period from 1977-1987 that culminated in the publication of Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987) witnessed tremendous changes in the foundations of Chicano/a studies. From Chicano/a identity politics which relied on Aztlán (In 1000B.C. Aztecs immigrated into what is now Mexico and Central America, which is supposed to the
Edenic place of their origin, Aztlán. At the beginning of the 16th century Spaniards conquered Mexico and settled down there. This, in turn founded a new hybrid race, *el mexicano*-people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood. Chicano/as, Mexican Americans are the offspring of these) in the early 1980s, Chicano/a studies evolved to incorporate new notions of *mestizaje* by the end of the decade. In the wake of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, the invocation of *mestizaje* has produced a whole new language of signification, which includes borders, differences, multiple racial and ethnic histories, varying sexual and political orientations, and alternative geographies of labour and gender formation. This concept of borderlands did not arise from a vacuum. Two major Chicano/a autobiographies of the early 1980s, Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1982) and Cherríe Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca paso por sus labios* (1983) are, according to Jose F. Aranda, Jr., more responsible than anything else for the eventual displacement of the myth of Aztlán in Chicano/a studies.

Literature by and about Chicano/as has particularly grown since the 1990s. Ideologically trapped between white feminism and the nationalism of La Raza, as Kristin Carter-Sanborn points out, Chicana writers have pursued such new themes as physical and sexual abuse, marginalization of women, lesbianism, and the creation of complex Chicana identity. Many Chicana writers have incorporated feminist and postmodern critical theories into their works, while others have sought to study traditional female mythological figures (for example, Malinche, La Llorona, and the Virgen de Guadalupe) in the context of patriarchal Chicano culture and then to transform them in their works.
Such authors as Denise Chávez, Ana Castillo and Moraga, for example, focus specifically on women’s sexual and social marginalization and its effects in their writings. Along with greater thematic diversity in contemporary Chicano/a literature, has come a greater variety of genres, with autobiographies, anthologies, short stories, poetry, drama, and detective fiction becoming more popular and widespread. These writers also indulge in great experimentation in the method of telling the story, by breaking boundaries of genres to produce something new.

Best known for her prose volume *The House on Mango Street* for which she received the American Book Award and the Before Columbus Foundation Book Award in 1985, Sandra Cisneros, another author chosen for detailed analysis in the thesis, was born on December 20, 1954, in Chicago, Illinois, to a Mexican father and a Chicana mother. The only girl in a family of seven children, she often felt dominated by her brothers and father. Her sense of cultural displacement as a Chicana was in part due to her family’s frequent moves between Mexico and the United States. She spent the majority of her childhood living in apartment buildings in the poorer neighborhoods of Chicago’s South Side. When she was a teenager, her parents bought a house, a goal they had always dreamed of achieving; but Cisneros regarded the house as ugly and shabby, and nothing like what she had imagined a house should be. As she was growing up, she spoke Spanish with her father and English with her mother and most of her work is written in English but also contains smatterings of Spanish words and phrases. Cisneros earned a B.A. in English from Loyola University in 1976, and enrolled in the graduate programme in creative writing at the renowned University of Iowa Writer’s Workshop.
After earning an M.F.A. in creative writing in 1978, Cisneros returned to Chicago where she taught at the Latino Youth Alternative High School. Her first poetry collection, a chapbook entitled *Bad Boys*, was published in 1980. In 1981, she began working as a college recruiter and counselor for minority students at Loyola. She received a National Endowment for the Arts Grant in 1982, allowing her to serve for one year as artist-in-residence at the Michael Karolyi Institute in Vence, France. Upon returning to the United States, Cisneros worked as the literature director of the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio, Texas. With the success of *The House on Mango Street*, she began a series of guest professorships at Universities throughout the United States, including California State University at Chico (1987 to 1988), University of California at Berkeley(1988), University of California at Irvine (1990), University of Michigan(1990), and University of New Mexico at Albuquerque (1991). Cisneros has written three essays in which she discusses her development as a writer and her conceptualization of *The House on Mango Street*: “Ghosts and Voices: Writing from Obsession,” “Notes to a Young(er) Writer,” and “Do You Know Me?: I Wrote The House on Mango Street.

*Woman Hollering Creek* (1991), Cisneros’ next fiction volume, is a collection of twenty-two stories, narrated as interior monologues of a variety of Mexican American women living in the area of San Antonio, Texas. In contrast to the adolescent narrator of *The House on Mango Street*, the stories in *Woman Hollering Creek* are narrated by mature adult women with a complex range of emotions and relationships. In these stories, Cisneros continues to explore themes of Chicana identity, particularly in terms of the conflicts between popular American culture and traditional Mexican culture, as well as
conflicts between traditional gender roles and individual freedom. The story “Woman Hollering Creek,” for example, portrays a woman whose fantasies about marriage are based on telenovelas- Spanish-language soap operas. The lives of the characters in the soap operas are contrasted against the protagonist’s life and her marriage to an abusive man. In “Never Marry a Mexican,” a young woman becomes insecure about her Chicana identity because she does not know how to speak Spanish. Caramelo (2002) is an episodic novel narrated by the fourteen-year-old Celaya Reyes, who is known as Lala. Lala’s family travels by car from their home in Chicago to a family reunion at the house of Soledad, the “Awful Grandmother,” in Mexico City. Lala’s narrative weaves back and forth between the past and the present as she struggles to reconcile her cultural heritage and family history with a desire to assert her own individual identity. Lala draws on the image of the “rebozo caramelo,” a traditional (caramel-coloured) family shawl worn by her grandmother, as a metaphor for the interweaving of family legend, national history, multi-cultural fusion, and personal experience into a unified pattern that constitutes her complex self-identity. Cisneros relates a panoramic family saga that spans three generations against a backdrop of Mexico’s turbulent history. She includes numerous extensive footnotes within the text of Caramelo, explaining a variety of cultural and historical facts that are relevant to Lala’s story. While Cisneros is best known for her prose writings, her several books of poetry have been recognized as powerful works of lyrical writing that address similar themes to those within her stories and novels. Her poetry volumes include The Rodrigo Poems (1985). My Wicked, Wicked Ways (1987) and Loose Woman (1994).
In ‘The House on Mango Street’, one of Cisneros’ works chosen for close examination in this thesis, she creates a bildungsroman centring upon the life of Esperanza Cordero whose search for self-realization is one of its focal concerns. This is actually a series of forty four interconnected vignettes or stories related by Esperanza in the first person. It describes from an adolescent perspective life in the Latin barrio of Chicago, a life often characterized by poverty and disappointment. Esperanza, an adolescent heroine, is disillusioned with her life in general. She is especially sick of living in her dingy and dreary old house which truly reflects the utter drabness of the Mango Street outside. Esperanza’s longing to own a real house, one she would not be ashamed of pointing out to her friends and various acquaintances, is expressed throughout the novel. In the very first page of the novel there is a reference to the house on Mango Street, “The house on Mango Street is ours, and we don’t have to pay rent to anybody, or share the yard with the people downstairs, or be careful not to make too much noise, and there isn’t a landlord banging on the ceiling with a broom. But even so, it’s not the house we’d thought we’d get” (HMS 3). Not even for a moment did she think that they were better off than they were in the rented flat which was on the third floor of a run-down building on Loomis street. Once a nun from her school passing by questioned her, “You live there?” (HMS 5), as if it was something to be ashamed of. The way she said it made her feel like “nothing”. She “knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. The house on Mango Street isn’t it. For the time being, Mama says. Temporary, says Papa. But I know how those things go” (HMS 5).
At the beginning of Sandra Cisneros's novel *Caramelo* (2002), taken for in-depth study here, Celaya Reyes, the story's young protagonist and narrator, departs from Chicago with her parents and siblings to go on their annual family road trip to Mexico. Once across the border, they will visit Celaya's grandmother, a staunchly conservative and judgmental old woman who never has kind things to say to or about her Americanized grandchildren. Predictably, Celaya is less than thrilled about having to give up her summer vacation in order to spend time with her "Awful Grandmother" (*C* 3), who according to Bill Johnson González is, “a character so caustic that she seems to have been dreamt up specifically as a perverse inversion of the myriad lovable and saintly grandmothers who so often seem to personify Tradition in literature”(* 5: 3 *). What makes Cisneros's work unlike so many other Chicano texts, which tend to depict that community's struggle to preserve its cultural difference from the dominant culture of the United States, is precisely the novel's exploration of the tensions and critical differences within the Mexican/Chicano community; specifically, *Caramelo* represents the clash between the values of diasporic Mexican Americans and the traditional mores and attitudes of the Mexican middle class. It explores the necessity of finding a third space for the protagonist. The novel seeks to interrogate the traditional norms of Mexican culture and in particular to reveal the exclusions and repressions by means of which those norms are secured and also how Celaya succeeds in bridging the gap between two conflicting cultural identities.
The Poetics of the Hybridized ‘Self’ in the Third Space

Against the notion of having a pure, monolithic and homogeneous cultural identity, post colonial critics and multiculturalists have come up with the concept of culture as heterogeneous, diverse and constantly in a flux insisting on its fluid nature. In postcolonial discourse, the notion that any culture or identity is pure or essential is disputed by Bill Ashcroft, Stuart Hall, etc. It’s not merely the authentic and essentialised nature of cultural identity that is called into question by theorists, but its supposedly fixed nature. Cultural identity undergoes a constant process of evolution. Cultural identity of a person/society is constantly making alliances, both within and outside their communities and forming new wholes. As Stuart Hall notes in ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, cultural identity should be thought of “as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (qtd. in Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader 110).

In Orientalism, Said diagnosed the paths of cultural domination that projected non-Western people as the other. In Can the Subaltern Speak? (1994) Spivak argued that postcolonial subjects have no voice under the dominant regime of colonial discourse. Extending the work of Said and Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha starts with a deconstructive critique of the dichotomies of the West and the Orient, the centre and the periphery, the empire and the colonized, the oppressor and the oppressed, and the self and the other. He adapts Derrida’s analysis of how binary oppositions structure Western thought, arguing that such dichotomies are too reductive because they imply that any national culture is
unitary, homogeneous, and defined by ‘fixity’ or an essential core. Instead, Bhabha proposes that nationalities, ethnicities, and identities are dialogic, indeterminate, and characterized by ‘hybridity, one of his key terms.

Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990) is primarily an intervention into "essentialist" readings of nationality that attempt to define and naturalize Third World "nations" by means of the supposedly homogenous, innate, and historically continuous traditions that falsely define and ensure their subordinate status. Nations, in other words, are "narrative" constructions that arise from the "hybrid" interaction of contending cultural constituencies. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha extends his explanation of the "liminal" or "interstitial" category that occupies a space "between" competing cultural traditions, historical periods, and critical methodologies. Again utilizing a complex criterion of semiotics and psychoanalysis, Bhabha examines the "ambivalence of colonial rule" and suggests that it enables a capacity for resistance in the performative "mimicry" of the "English book." Discussing artists such as Toni Morrison and Nadine Gordimer, Bhabha seeks to find the "location of culture" in the marginal, "haunting," "unhomely" spaces between dominant social forms.

In ‘The Commitment to Theory’ (*The Location of Culture*), he defined hybridity as what is new, neither the one nor the other, which emerges from a Third Space. To reinforce this fluid sense of nationality and identity, he employs a vocabulary of process-oriented terms, including dialogic, translation, negotiation, in-between, cross-reference, liminality and ambivalence. Although Derrida is fundamental to his work, Bhabha draws
on a wide array of 20th century theorists throughout ‘The Commitment to Theory’. Building on the influential concept of nations set forth by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983), Bhabha stresses how nationality is narratively produced, rather than arising from an intrinsic essence. From Mikhail Bakhtin, he takes the concept of dialogue to stress that colonialism is not a one-way process but entails an interaction between colonizer and colonized. Regarding identity, he draws on Franz Fanon’s psychoanalytic model of colonialism and Jacques Lacan’s concepts of ‘mimicry’ and the split subject is forced to produce. This ‘mimicry’ in turn both revises colonial discourse and creates a new, hybrid identity for the colonial subject. The goal of his theorizing of hybridity is not simply to modify the terms of debate in postcolonial studies but to make a political intervention. Employing a deconstructive reversal of the opposition between textuality and the world, he claims that political events are in fact textual and discursive, often generated and spurred by oppositional cultural practices. The concept of hybridity militates against restrictive notions of cultural identity that result in political separatism, as seen in nationalistic movements or in identity politics. Hybridity fosters the larger goal of socialist community while acknowledging cultural differences. Such socialist community arises from the solidarity of different groups and movements working in coalition to create a new, progressive hegemony, as Stuart Hall also points out.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha states that cultural identities are not the result of predetermined, stereotypical and narrow assumptions that confine colonizer and colonized in very limited contexts. In the chapter: ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of colonial Discourse’, he focuses on the concept of ‘mimicry’. Bhabha
suggests that the objective of imperialism is to turn the colonized into a replica of the colonizer, maintaining the gap that racial differences always imply. Colonialist discourse does not intend to situate colonizer and colonized at the same ontological level because this would betray the stagnant power relations existing between them. He argues that it is not the same to be Anglicized as it is to be English; the first is a process in which Britain necessarily has to intervene in order to mould a submissive acolyte, whereas the second is an innate gift that only those born in Britain can enjoy.

Bhabha’s theories of Hybridity, Liminality and Third space can be employed to explain the fluid, non-dualistic and shifting nature of identity. His concepts of ambivalence and mimicry have made it clear that cultures must be understood as complex intersections of multiple places, historical temporalities, and subject positions. He has developed his theory of hybridity to describe the construction of cultural identity within conditions of colonialism. Bhabha contends that a new hybrid identity or subject position (other subject positions being that of colonizer and the colonized) emerges from the interweaving of elements of the colonizer and the colonized challenging the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity. He is of the view that hybridity which represents cultural difference is positioned in-between the colonizer and the colonized. He defined hybridity as what is ‘new’, neither the one nor the other ‘which emerges’ from a Third Space. Bhabha considers hybridity arising from a liminal or in-between space which he terms as the third space. This is a space intrinsically critical of essentialist positions of identity and conceptualization of ‘original or originary culture’. As he states in *The Location of Culture*, “it is that Third Space . . . that ensure that meaning and
symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity” (55). This Third Space of enunciation makes the structure of meaning and sense of identity an ambivalent process, according to Bhabha. Hybridity is to be the Third Space, which enables multiple positions to emerge.

Bhabha’s Third Space represents a location/ space where new cultural meaning and production occurs blurring the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorizations of culture and identity. According to Bhabha, this hybrid Third Space is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no ‘primordial unity or fixity’. He explains liminality as the middle state, a stage of transition or a border zone. Liminality illumines the nature and importance of various forms of space that can be identified in human cultural experience. Bhabha adopted this middle notion of transition, what Gloria Anzaldúa calls ‘nepantla’, meaning a consciousness of borderlands, seeing it as central in explaining the nature and importance of various forms of space that can be identified in human cultural experience. Following Renée Green, Bhabha employs the image of a staircase to explain liminality. The stairwell connecting two floors is the liminal space, in-between different identities, in the present context between dominant Euro-centric and ethnic identities. As he states in the ‘Introduction’ to The Location of Culture “The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (5). Sandra Cisneros and Maxine Hong Kingston are
situated in that liminal state/ interstitial passage due to their ethnic background and the culturally divergent environment they inhabit. How they locate themselves or create comfortable zones/ spaces for themselves is an interesting study and is worthy of serious analysis.

Chicana, Sandra Cisneros and Chinese American writer, Maxine Hong Kingston demonstrate a more differentiated self-perception as writers than authors whose cultural and linguistic background is less diverse. The way they deal with the interaction between conflicting cultural codes imparted to them from their ethnic background and the dominant culture of USA; between two different languages; between two concepts of femininity can be understood as a constant process in which they continuously evolve themselves in a new culture. The transitional nature of their protagonists’ cultural identity/self is fully evident in the personal trajectories of Maxine in *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976) and in *China Men* (1980), Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street* (1984) and Celaya in *Caramelo* (2002). These are autobiographical, semi-fictitious accounts of their development as writers in a culture that is familiar as well as foreign. In their texts, both Kingston and Cisneros create dialogues between their cultural heritage and their new environment as a means of self-exploration.

In an interview with Pilar E. Rodriguez Aranda, the Chicana writer, Sandra Cisneros speaks about the dilemma in getting along with dichotomous cultures. “We’re always straddling two countries, and we’re always living in that kind of schizophrenia
that I call, being a Mexican woman living in an American society, but not belonging to either culture. In some sense we’re not Mexican and in some sense we’re not American. I couldn’t live in Mexico because my ideas are too . . . Americanized. On the other hand, I can’t live in America, or I do live here but, in some ways, almost like a foreigner…And it’s very strange straddling these two cultures to try to define some middle ground so that you don’t commit suicide or you don’t become so depressed or you don’t self explode” (CLC 69:149). What Amy Ling says about the second generation immigrant experiences in *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* is relevant in this context:

The very condition [of the between-world] itself carries both negative and positive charges. On the one hand, being between worlds can be interpreted to mean occupying the space or gulf between two banks; one is thus in a state of suspension, accepted by neither side and therefore truly belonging nowhere . . . . On the other hand, viewed from a different perspective, being between worlds may be considered as having footholds on both banks and therefore belonging to two worlds at once. One does not have less; one has more . . . the person between worlds is in the indispensable position of being a bridge (177).

It is about that ‘state of suspension’ Cisneros speaks in the above quoted passage. But, Kingston and Cisneros succeed in finding that ‘middle ground’ eventually. The major works of these ethnic writers highlight the process of self-reflection and self-definition they undergo as hybrid writers who are trying to establish a voice in a culturally divergent environment. They end up “not only double-voiced and double-
accented... but is also double-languaged” (Bakhtin). The result is heteroglossia which, on the basis of these ethnic writers’ literal as well as metaphorical movements, brings languages together to create their ‘double-voice’. As Kingston’s and Cisneros’ works demonstrate, the ‘double-voice’, which mediates between cultures, helps them to successfully negotiate their identities.

However, there are a number of ways in which these writers deal with their situation and their heteroglossia in a ‘Third Space’. In this thesis, I propose to demonstrate how Cisneros and Kingston deal with their positions as writers between two cultures. I would suggest that, as a writer of Latina origin, Cisneros feels more comfortable with her hybrid existence than Kingston, whose Oriental background makes it more difficult for her to come to terms with her identity. The progress towards an understanding of her hybridity and writing within a creative ‘Third Space’ is much more arduous in her case. I would also trace the different means of how, as part of the process of self identification, Kingston and Cisneros negotiate their identities in relation to their far away homes (sometimes, homes of their dreams as in The House on Mango Street) and their homes in reality, and how they achieve the hybridized status. Kingston, in her writing, undermines the idea of a homogenous American culture and literature by combining ‘Western’ with ‘Oriental’ traditions while acknowledging the fact that both traditions cannot exist as something ‘pure’. By questioning set definitions of what it means to be an American or a Chinese, she explores her cultural roots and offers alternative positions such as ‘Third Spaces’ where American and Chinese voices intermingle to produce something remarkable and melodious just like the poetess T’sai
Yen does in ‘A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe’. In her stories, Cisneros tends to be bothered about the physical space she occupies. There is a yearning for escaping the space she dwells in, as well as a desire to return as depicted in *The House on Mango Street* and also a constant shuttling between two cultures/ spaces as in *Caramelo* in which the protagonist Celaya’s life has been shaped by frequent migrations from Mexico to the States. Her preoccupation with physical space points to a longing to identify with a Third Space.

The thesis attempts to analyze how Asian American writer Maxine Hong Kingston and Chicana Sandra Cisneros arrive at the realization of indefinable and fluid nature of identity/selfhood. They succeed in breaking fixed barriers around the self. What needs to be explored here is the nexus of gender, ethnicity and cultural identity formation; and also how these writers experiment with generic conventions which reflect the multifaceted nature of their identity. Their works question the definitions of the ‘self’ proposed by others and give them new meanings. With a central focus on the notion of hybridized nature of identity, the difficulty of defining the boundaries of the self as these boundaries have the tendency to overlap constantly, this research study will demonstrate how Kingston and Cisneros through their works destabilize concepts of static margins of identity/ selfhood at the levels of culture and gender, and also by the resistance shown towards generic conventions.