Abstract

Ethnic American writing offers a kaleidoscopic view of the ethnic world of the United States. Much of Ethnic American writing captures ethnic American’s dilemma in choosing between two different worlds-- between different cultural ethos, gender roles etc. The dissertation aims to analyse how the female protagonists in *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts, China Men* by Maxine Hong Kingston; *The House on Mango street and Caramelo* by Sandra Cisneros struggle to come to terms with their hybridized identities. They belong to different ethnic backgrounds and have experienced the dilemma in getting along with dichotomous cultures, both the Euro-centric American culture and their ethnic cultures (Chinese and Chicano/a). They emerge as empowered women by rejecting the rigid cultural and gender norms set by both ethnic communities and the dominant American society and by evolving themselves into something new, in a Third Space as visualized by Bhabha. The hypothesis argued is that the protagonists of these works had to break the barriers set up by their ethnic cultures and Euro-centric American culture in order to create spaces whereby they could emerge as powerful women writers, completely accepting their hybridized identities. This sense of hybridity arises from a liminal or in-between space which Bhabha terms as the Third Space. In this space essentialist positions of identities are rejected. This Third Space is a middle state, a stage of transition where they are neither authentically Chinese / Mexican nor are they like Euro-centric Americans. They adopt an in-between state, emerging as Chinese Americans , Chicano/a, where the word ‘Chinese’ acts as an adjective to the noun ‘American’.
The thesis is divided into a preface and five chapters. The first chapter is divided into two parts. The first section is an overview of ethnic American literature. It also highlights the major preoccupations of multicultural American literature. The section also traces the evolution of Asian American literature and Chicano/a literature, two specific branches of ethnic American literature to which the selected writers Kingston and Cisneros belong. The second section discusses Bhabha’s theory of the hybridized ‘Self’ in the Third Space which is used as a basis to analyse the texts under consideration.

The second chapter analyses how rigid notions on gender prevailing in the ethnic cultures of Kingston and Cisneros, and the concept of femininity offered by the dominant Euro-centric culture in America confuse them. How assigned gender roles can be subverted or reversed in order to find viable female selves occupying the Third Space or the in-between space are shown by the protagonists of these two writers.

The third chapter discusses how Kingston and Cisneros negotiate with the pull of different cultures. Both inter- and intracultural understanding is taken into account when analysing these works. This dichotomous view clearly brings out how they grow into a consciousness of their hybridized identities. Chapter four of the thesis is a detailed study of how new narrative strategies are invented and how generic conventions are violated by Kingston and Cisneros in order to come to terms with their in-between state.

The last chapter is a consolidation of the observations in the previous chapters by comparing and contrasting Kingston and Cisneros. They successfully create a Third Space whereby they could emerge as wholesome individuals. They come out as powerful women writers, after sifting through, and imbibing disparate experiences.