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'To Be or Not to Be': Liminal Spaces and Chicana Experiences in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*

Tessa Jose

Chicana literature, a burgeoning yet underrepresented field in the Indian academic scene, encompasses the writings of Mexican-American women, providing a powerful framework for interrogating the complexities of ethnicity, migration and gender disparities. The paper undertakes an analysis of Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, an influential text in Chicana literature, to examine the dilemmatic status Chicanas find themselves in, especially regarding the liminal spaces and experiences that often define their existence. Through a nuanced analysis of the protagonist's involvements along the Mango Street, this study examines the ways in which liminality shapes the protagonist's experiences and informs her navigation of identity and belonging, within the complexities of Chicana experience. The paper locates three major metaphorical implications associated with the central image of "street" – as a borderland space, as a patriarchal space, and as a transitional space, elucidating the complex intersections and implications of these concepts. By offering a contextualised exploration of the role of liminality in shaping identity, culture and belonging, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the transformative potential of liminal spaces, influencing individual and collective identity formation. This study integrates two hitherto

underexplored areas of inquiry in the Indian academic landscape– Chicana literature and liminality–thereby forging a new trajectory of discussion and engagement in existing scholarly discourse.

Keywords: Chicana literature; Liminal space; Borderlands; Macho culture; Transformative potentials

Introduction

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros (1984) is a seminal text in Chicana literature which deals with struggles, both physical and psychological, experienced by the Chicana community, one among the largest and most rapidly growing racial-ethnic communities in the United States. The paper undertakes a study of the select text to understand manifold crises experienced by the Chicana folk, specifically the intricate interstitial positions that define various facets of their life and their existence. Cisneros' text, considered as one among the prominent works in Latina literature and Chicana literature in particular, is widely read, taught and discussed in academic circles. The wide reception and acceptance of the novel is evident from its sale rate of more than six million copies since its publication in 1984, and its translation to more than twenty languages worldwide. *The House on Mango Street*, which was on *The New York Times* Best Seller list and was a recipient of the American Book Award in 1985, opened a door to witnessing and critiquing normalised oppressions and subjugations experienced by Chicanas in the U.S.'s racial-ethnic settings. Poverty, marginalisation, disillusionment and desperate conditions encircling Chicana lives feature as prominent themes in this seminal text.

Inspired from the studies and observations made by prominent anthropologists Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner who address liminal spaces as 'passages', the eighth edition of *A Handbook to Literature* (2000) defines liminality as "the state of being on a threshold in space or time" (Harmon, 2000, p.291). The famous Shakespearean dilemmatic question could be put forward as an effective example of a liminal experience in which one occupies an uncertain realm of thought and experience, unable to clearly process one's state. The paper is an attempt to read Cisneros' *Mango Street* along similar

lines. Cisneros in the novel brilliantly crafts a microcosmic depiction of wide-ranging issues encompassing Chicana lives. The paper attempts to analyse 'Mango Street,' the central image in the narrative, as a liminal space that complicates as well as complements the lives of the residents. The twofold crisis experienced by Chicanas, that of being treated as aliens not only within 'the dominant culture' but also within their own culture, is studied in detail, along with addressing the transformative potential of the liminal spaces through an examination of the strategies employed by the characters to surpass their vulnerabilities. A study on metaphorical implications of Mango Street as a liminal space for Chicanas offers a nuanced understanding of how characters navigate various cultural, linguistic, and social borders within the neighbourhood, resulting in character development and enhanced awareness.

The paper adopts a literary-critical methodology that synthesises close textual reading with theoretical reflection and intertextual analysis. The novel is examined through the critical lens of border epistemes and Chicana feminist epistemology, with particular attention to questions of identity, marginalisation, gender politics and spatial dynamics. The paper engages with Chicana feminist theories–particularly concepts such as "borderland consciousness", *nepantla*, and *la facultad*–to illuminate the novel's cultural and political resonances. Arnold Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's formulations of liminality serve as a general conceptual entry point. The study, however, draws extensively on prominent Chicana theorist and scholar Gloria Anzaldua's (1999) seminal text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* as a central theoretical lens, offering critical insights into reconfiguration of liminality within Chicana thought.

Chicana Literary Landscape

The Chicana/o (feminine form 'Chicana' and masculine form 'Chicano') are people of Mexican descent residing in the U.S. It is a self-proclaimed identity and it emerged and evolved in the U.S. during the mid-twentieth century, in the backdrop of two major movements which sought to create a more inclusive and unprejudiced society in the country. The Civil Rights Movement (1950s-1960s) which focused

on ending racial segregation towards African-Americans and the Chicano Movement (1960s-1970s), a social and political movement that challenged and questioned racist tendencies, discrimination and marginalisation against Chicana/o communities, formed a strong foundation for the voicing of rights of Chicana/os. They also provided a fertile ground for the development of Chicano literature and later Chicana literature.

Chicana literature marked its presence during the initial stages with the publication of poetry and some among the major poets were Anna Nieto Gomez, Ana Montes, Leticia Hernandez, Lucha Corpi, Alma Villanueva, Bernice Zamora and Ana Castillo. As time passed, women entered the field of writing political essays and short stories which later paved way for longer works of fiction. Notable writers during the period were Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, Denise Chavez, Mary Helen Ponce, Gina Valdes, Alma Luz Villanueva, Beverly Silva, Aurora Levins Morales and so on. Chicana writers mainly used writing as a means to critique patriarchal and hegemonic practices that existed within and outside their community. *The House on Mango Street* by Cisneros in the 1980s initiated and inspired community feeling among Chicanas, which eventually paved the way for an increased number of publications from the part of women. Cisneros' texts, especially *The House on Mango Street* have been subject to detailed studies and analyses pertaining to power politics, spatial dynamics, and gender concerns. However, such research does not seem to properly investigate or duly acknowledge the concept of liminality, especially the transformative potential associated with the concept. The paper emphasises the challenges as well as changes emerging from the liminal spaces represented in Cisneros' text, attempts to fill this gap, and also offers novel perspectives in this regard.

The House on Mango Street presents a fictionalised representation of the north-eastern part of America, its Chicana residents, and other diverse immigrant communities. Mango Street is portrayed as a fictionalised barrio space in the U.S. where Chicanas have buried their hopes of the American Dream and live their lives in utter poverty and disillusionment. Cisneros herself claims that the work contains autobiographical elements, recounting the experiences of

many women she saw around her. Very much like Esperanza Cordero, a twelve-year old girl, the narrator of the story, Cisneros comes from a family of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans, and for this reason, Mexico and its memories loom large in Esperanza's life. The text is crafted in the form of forty-four interrelated vignettes, each offering a glimpse into the lives of various Chicana women along the street. Though they are individually named as Marin, Sally, Rosa Vargas, Alicia, Aunt Lupe, Mamacita, Rafaela, Minerva, and so on, their experiences and inner strife invariably coincide. These women possess different faces and names, but have identical desires and yearnings. Esperanza too is trapped within her new house on the street since she comes to occupy a house totally in contrast to her expectations. Mango Street, which seems to both ruse and imprison those residing within its environs, thus invites potential readings of intersectional Chicana experiences.

Mango Street as a Borderland Space: Reflections on the U.S.-Mexico Border Crisis

The House on Mango Street commences with the following lines:

> We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, and before that I can't remember. But what I remember most is moving a lot. . . . I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it. For the time being, Mama says. Temporary, says Papa. But I know how those things go. (Cisneros, 1984, p.3)

Esperanza, the twelve-year old narrator, disappointingly introduces the readers to Mango Street as her family's final destination, although her parents try to convince her otherwise. Her family had finally moved to a residence which they could call their own, but it turns out that the place doesn't materialise their dreams or expectations. Nor do they receive a welcoming gesture. Esperanza is at a fix, because that is not the house she dreamt of all throughout her life and hence an ideal house in all its myriad hues reappears, recurs

in her dreams. The thought becomes a major part of her existence, rather the thought gradually evolves into Esperanza and vice versa. Thus, though she occupies a place which seems to be a final destination, she constantly looks forward to belonging to another place, better and brighter. Esperanza, who remembers "moving a lot" in her life, reflects on the migrant experiences and realities of instability and temporariness surrounding her life. Reading along these lines, Mango Street becomes a transitional space and hence it turns out to be a space of deliberations, temporariness and alterations. Here resides a group of people who are sandwiched between diverse worlds, especially that of the U.S. and Mexico. In the novel, one sees a number of instances where Esperanza and other characters reminisce about Mexico and Mexican experiences. Mango Street becomes a symbolic representation of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands where Chicana population find themselves at a 'neither here nor there' condition. For the same reason, when Esperanza and her sister Nenny pass by a house in the neighbourhood, they recollect their memories about houses in Mexico and how the house "looks like Mexico" although "there was nothing about the house that looked exactly like the houses . . . [they had seen or] remembered." Esperanza states, "I'm not even sure why I thought it, but it seemed to feel right" (pp.17-18). Similar is the case with Mamacita who is described as "the big mama of the man across the street" (p.76). Deeply affected by her transplantation to an alien land, she spends days and nights in the memories of her Mexican land, "plays the Spanish radio show and sings all the homesick songs about her country in a voice that sounds like a seagull" (p.77). Women seem to be more affected by this longing for their Mexican home than their male counterparts. Esperanza's brothers are not portrayed as showing any affiliation towards their Mexican past. It is Esperanza and her sister who share a similar train of thought regarding this. Similarly, Mamacita's son does not understand the intense pain in his mother's voice. When she breaks down over the loss of her home, the man becomes infuriated:

> He starts screaming and you can hear it all the way down the street. 'Ay', she says, she is sad. 'Oh', he says. 'Not again'. '*Cuándo, cuándo, cuándo'* she asks. '*Ay, caray!* We are home.

> This is home. Here I am and here I stay. Speak English. Speak English. Christ! *Ay!'* Mamacita, who does not belong, every once in a while lets out a cry, hysterical, high, as if he had torn the only skinny thread that kept her alive, the only road out to that country. And then to break her heart forever, the baby boy, who has begun to talk, starts to sing the Pepsi commercial he heard on TV. 'No speak English', she says to the child who is singing in the language that sounds like tin. 'No speak English, no speak English,' and bubbles into tears. 'No, no, no,' as if she can't believe her ears. (pp.77-78)

Francisco A. Lomeli et.al. (2019) comment in *Routledge Handbook of Chicana/o Studies* that, "Borderlands is a space of new and old cultural expressions, that is a place where a home is sought" (Lomeli, 2019, p.100). Chicanas residing along Mango Street hold this nostalgic longing mainly due to the discriminatory practices they face on an almost regular basis. Mexico had been a Spanish colony for nearly three hundred years. These Spanish speaking Mexicans became American citizens when the U.S. annexed the Mexican Provinces of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas and Utah in 1848. The International border separating the U.S. and Mexico has till date been a subject of concern, conflict and criticism. Many key episodes have gone into the creation of the existing borders separating the two countries including Mexican-American War, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, treaty in 1884, and the Gadsden Purchase. With the Mexican Revolution lasting for 10 years, ending in 1920, and World War I (1914-1918), the relation between the two countries that was till then quite agreeable got severely strained and more measures were adopted to tighten borderland securities. Borderlands eventually turned into sites of brutal violence, conflicts and restrictions. This convoluted the status and lives of Chicana/o population intensifying their identity crises and sense of non-belonging. This presence of long-standing uncertainty relating to belonging has always put Chicana/o population at liminal positions. And the U.S.-Mexican border for the same reason turns out to be the major factor creating and contributing to the liminal status Chicanas currently occupy.

Born and brought up in the United States, and legally possessing citizenship status in the country however does not entitle the members of the community to equal privileges. Discrimination and challenges still persist. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which guaranteed the U.S. citizenship and full rights to Mexicans, who resided in the lands annexed by the U.S., however seems to be forgotten and ignored. Esperanza, who is promised a permanent home which she could proudly call her own, is denied such a privilege possibly due to the above mentioned reasons. At Mango Street, the borderland space between the U.S. and Mexico, characters strive hard to negotiate their cultural heritage and the broader American culture. This liminal position could have been addressed if they were welcomed with warmth and respect. However, that does not happen. When Esperanza longs for a friend, Cathy, a white girl residing in the neighbourhood tells her, "I'll be your friend. But only till next Tuesday. That's when we move away. Got to. Then as if she forgot I just moved in, she says the neighbourhood is getting bad. . . . they'll just have to move a little farther north from Mango Street, a little farther away every time people like us keep moving in" (Cisneros, 1984, p.13). Leo R. Chavez (2019), a well-known American author and anthropologist in his article titled "Immigration, Latinas/os, and the media" introduces the concept of 'Latino threat' which he defines as an anti-immigrant discourse in the U.S. that creates and promotes a negative representation of Latinos populating the place. The term suggests how mainstream media have circulated the image of Latinos, especially women, as a potential threat to the nation, addressing their entry into the country as a more "insidious invasion, one that includes the capacity of the invaders to reproduce" (Chavez, 2019, p.118). In fact Esperanza states, "Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. All brown all around, we are safe" (Cisneros, 1984, p.28). Another instance which substantiates the idea is relating the unfortunate death of Geraldo, a Mexican residing in the neighbourhood. Esperanza states that in the eyes of whites he is just "another brazer who didn't speak English. Just another wetback. You know the kind. The ones who always look ashamed" (p.66). She clearly offers a

picture of how whites view and judge the non-whites, especially the Mexicans in this context, "They never knew about the two-room flats and sleeping rooms he rented, the weekly money orders sent home, the currency exchange. How could they? His name was Geraldo. And his home is in another country. The ones he left behind are far away, will wonder, shrug, remember. Geraldo—he went north . . . we never heard from him again" (p.66). Race and racial understandings thus play a pivotal role in shaping the notions of belonging in the American setting. The racial configurations which position them in a confused state of being both insiders and outsiders simultaneously lead to a split in the psyche of these people which complicates everyday survival. These conditions have complicated lives of the Chicanas among whom a significant population reside in states bordering Mexico. The above ideas also hint at the unfulfilled American Dream concept, as Chicanas live a life of disappointment and disillusionment due to unrealised dreams of better socio-economic status in the country.

Since borderland represents an uncertain, irresolute space, a resultant of partitions and separations, inhabitants of the place normally are those rejected certain permissions or rights and forbidden from entering and enjoying certain privileges that the 'mainstream' revels in. The ones residing at borderlands are often categorised as 'transgressors' even if the former possess lawful documents, since borderlands always are associated with unlawful activities and practices and are observed as sites of suspicion and confusion, subject to intense patrolling and surveillance. The label 'Chicano/a' was ascribed inferior status initially and negative connotations were associated with the term, especially to refer to those residing near the U.S.-Mexican border. The images associated with the term included that of an unfortunate and underprivileged community living in pitiable conditions. Moving away from the borders thus gained importance in common consciousness. Gloria Anzaldua in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* elaborates the unfortunate circumstances and practices governing the U.S.-Mexican borderlands. According to her, "The U.S. - Mexican border *es una herida abierta* (is an open wound) where the third world grates against the first and bleeds" (Anzaldua, 1999, p.3).

The Mango Street that Cisneros portrays seems to indicate a miniature representation of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, encapsulating tensions between identity, home and belonging. The street which does not seem to offer security or comfort reminds one of liminal spaces that do not generally qualify as places of residence. Such spaces are often associated with movements, transitions and temporariness and are generally addressed as 'in-between' spaces which put people in vulnerable status and problematise the concept of belonging. And for the same reason, Esperanza identifies herself to four skinny trees that "do not belong here but are here. Four raggedy excuses planted by the city" (Cisneros, 1984, p.74). She recognises her existence as very similar to that of those trees that thrive hard in adverse conditions, finding means to survive at an unwelcoming place. She looks up to those trees for guidance since they inspire growth and resilience, "When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees. When there is nothing left to look at on this street. Four who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be" (p.75). This in a way offers positive affirmations and hopes for a better survival at a place like Mango Street symbolising the U.S.-Mexico borderland and the crises ensuing from it.

Mango Street as a Patriarchal Space: Reflections on Macho Culture

Paralleling the concept of liminality is the idea of *nepantla*, a Nahuatl (an indigenous language of the Aztecs) term, introduced by Anzaldua (2002), referring to the state of being 'in the middle' or occupying an 'in- between' status. She states, "From the in-between place of *nepantla*, you see through the fiction of the monoculture, the myth of the superiority of the white races. And eventually you begin seeing through your ethnic culture's myth of the inferiority of *mujeres* [women]" (Anzaldua, 2002, p.549). The concept is of great prominence and significance in Chicana/o thought since it tends to explore and examine complexities associated with culture, identity and hybridity especially within a Chicana context. It specifically embodies experiences of borderland living where individuals and communities traverse conflicting terrains of personal, social and cultural borderlands.

Cherrie Moraga, another prominent Chicana writer and scholar, engages with the concept focusing extensively on gender and sexuality, in addition to the racial dimensions it focuses on. Reading in a comparable manner, Mango Street seems to be a representation of *nepantla* since the residents, especially women, persistently endeavour to navigate various slippery terrains of comfort, safety, and belonging. Most of the houses along the street described by Esperanza appear to be micro-borderlands, creating a state of psychic unrest largely in women. Each house consists of women sitting by the windows "the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow" (Cisneros, 1984, p.11), performing household chores day till night "tired all the time from buttoning and bottling and babying" (p.29), living in fear of the men in their lives "afraid of nothing except four-legged fur. And fathers" (p.32), waiting for exciting events to occur in their lives "waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life" (p.27). The street does not even offer a temporary solace to its women residents, rather intensifies their tribulations and accentuates their sense of loss. Windows symbolically represent a threshold, where women sit by all day, unsatisfied with their occupancy of the interiors of the domestic space, longing to move out of that space. These micro-borderlands of familial space, or rather patriarchal space, push these women into experiences of liminality. They do not truly possess a sense of belonging within the domestic realm though ironically they spend their whole lives performing various tasks and taking up diverse roles within that space. Performing household chores and tending to the needs of the male members of the family *per diem*, the women forget to live a life of their own, leaving unfulfilled desires and dreams to haunt them throughout their lives. Wedged at this liminal space, they find it unable to either fully embrace the current position they occupy or to cross over for a prospective life. This in-between status they experience throughout their lives, that of not completely belonging anywhere or even owning a sense of the same, complicates their survival.

The miserable realities of the Mango Street constantly underline denial of rights, rejection of equal privileges, and negation of opportunities to the Chicanas. The street, defined and dominated by a macho culture, also makes women traverse psychological border

spaces that of sanity/insanity. Women, who consistently ponder on escaping the confines of their homes, are in a way probing possible means to save themselves from the patriarchal clutches controlling the space and their lives. Rafaela is always locked indoors by her husband due to his egotistical outlook; Minerva suffers from the inconsistent behaviour of her husband who occasionally takes off and comes back as he pleases; Esperanza and Nenny are disgusted by the behaviour of their brothers who treat them differently outside the house since the latter are taught to do so. Esperanza's great-grandmother who used to be fierce and independent was thrown "a sack over her head and carried . . . off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier" by her great-grandfather (Cisneros, 1984, p.11). Esperanza's great-grandmother never forgave him, Esperanza states and so do not many other women along the street including Esperanza's mother, who are confined by the window sides, locked indoors, their dreams and aspirations bound by patriarchal control. When Mango Street becomes a patriarchal space, women navigate physical and psychological liminal spaces, that of immobility and their unwillingness to embrace that stationary status. Windows, as mentioned above assumes a powerful metaphorical implication in the text for the same reason.

As a counter to *machismo* one could consider the figure of '*La Nueva Chicana*' [The New Chicana] in Chicana tradition whom Ramon A. Gutierrez (2019) defines as " the new woman, . . . determined to interrogate and eradicate sexism as a form of oppression that was equal to racism. Both forms of subordination had to be equally fought in unison" (Gutierrez, 2019, p.63). Trials that Chicanas experience are manifold, in fact intersectional. Race, class and gender categories play chief roles in oppressing and subjugating their lives and experiences. Rosa Maria Gil and Carmen Inoa Vasquez (1996) in *The Maria Paradox* states "machismo mandates that men have options, and women have duties. . . . It means that a man's place is *en el mundo*, in the world, and a woman's place *is en la casa*, in the home" (Gil, 1996, p.6). Achieving autonomy hence becomes immensely challenging for Chicanas. *La Nueva Chicana* no more silently bears the upshots of *machismo,* rather strongly questions and problematises

water tight compartmentalisation of gender and gender roles. Esperanza who witnesses the dilemmas of women who strive to efficiently navigate liminal spaces of patriarchal expectations and counter schemes, evolves to *La Nueva Chicana* who firmly decides that, "I have inherited her [great grandmother's] name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (Cisneros, 1984, p.11).

Liminal Space as a Transformative Space

The previous sections attempted to examine how the novel engages with negative implications of being in a transitional state in the context of Chicana lives. However, the text also seems to offer insightful suggestions regarding the evolution of the liminal space to a transformative state leading to the growth and maturation of Esperanza. The girl as she matures, gains greater understanding and realisation regarding the realities around as well as responsibilities vested within her. Esperanza who initially is preoccupied with her frustrations of being in Mango Street and all the liminal experiences associated with it, gradually grows within this space. The endurance that Esperanza demonstrates indicates a mature character development evolved from her liminal identity. Similarly, she nurtures and nourishes collective interests in accordance with her individualistic dreams. For the same reason, one witnesses the protagonist who incessantly ruminates on escaping the Mango Street and moving far away, eventually stating that she will come back for the ones whom she has left behind, for the ones who could not escape their miserable lives. She thus gradually takes up the role of a liberator, a saviour who assumes it her responsibility to rescue Chicanas from their all-time struggles and troubles by letting them breathe freely and embrace a state of belonging. She replaces her initial attempts to prioritise personal interests, goals and development, with a consideration for collective interest and community liberation. These renewed thought processes and reckonings emerge from a newly developed faculty within Esperanza which seem to be in line with Gloria Anzaldua's concept of *la facultad*. Anzaldua (1999) introduces the concept of *la facultad* (the faculty) in *Borderlands/La Frontera* to indicate the ability to perceive deeper meanings behind peripheral realities and to reach greater understandings. She uses the word to denote an inner sight or

intuitive capacity evolved out of diverse, hybrid experiences and realities. She grounds her analyses in the Chicana terrain and supposes that those residing on the borderlands or who occupy any liminal space, develop this heightened capacity for reaching beyond the surface realities and embracing multiplicities since they are in continuous interactions with diverse socio-cultural elements. Anzaldua also attributes a mystical dimension to the concept stating that *la facultad* is not to be limited to an intellectual ability, a result of "conscious reasoning," as it also involves knowledge beyond the senses (Anzaldua, 1999, p.38). She classifies this faculty as a survival tactic adopted by those caught between diverse worlds where it helps in being in a state of constant awareness as well as acceptance:

> Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense. Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest- the females, the homosexuals of all races, the dark skinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign. . . . Confronting anything that tears the fabric of our everyday mode of consciousness and that thrusts us into a less literal and more psychic sense of reality increases awareness and *la facultad*. (1999, pp. 38-39)

On that same note, a few other women figures in the text also seem to possess this intuitive, intellectual faculty which help them in rightly moulding Esperanza, inspiring her to adopt the right steps for herself and for the community. These women who play a central role in her life include Aunt Guadalupe who encourages Esperanza to keep writing, assuring her that it will be a liberating experience; Esperanza's mother who urges her to study hard and get educated so she would not have to lower her head in shame before anyone; and finally the three sisters who bless her journey and remind her to stay rooted and return for those in need. It becomes significant to note Esperanza's observations about these women, since they seem to align well with Anzaldua's idea of *la facultad*: "They must've known, the sisters. They had the power and could sense what was what. . . . It was as if she could read my mind, as if she knew what I had wished for" (Cisneros, 1984, p.104). The experience of surviving in-between spaces of identity and culture contribute to better insights fostering multiple

perspectives related to happenings around. *La facultad* thus promotes a holistic understanding regarding oneself and one's surroundings. This also associates with the ability to acknowledge and accept differences or contradictions emerging out of conflicting dualities within oneself and one's environment. Esperanza and other women in the novel thus seem to possess this skill which they garner from liminal experiences thus leading to their character development. Anzaldua also comments that those possessing this capacity demonstrate an inclination towards creative expressions. Esperanza, who loves reading, writing stories and poems, exhibits creative expressions as means of her resistance and protest. This development of her creative faculties too emerges out of her interstitial position. She states towards the end of the novel:

> I like to tell stories. I tell them inside my head. I tell them after the mailman says, Here's your mail. Here's your mail he said. I make a story for my life, for each step my brown shoe takes. I say, "And so she trudged up the wooden stairs, her sad brown shoes taking her to the house she never liked." I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong. . . . What I remember most is Mango Street, sad red house, the house I belong but do not belong to. I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free. One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. (pp.109-110)

Stories turn out to be a means of rescuing the members of her community as well. She makes it a point to recount the experiences of the women she saw in houses along the Mango Street and thus build a dwelling for these women in her narratives where they could safely affirm their roots and belong. To those who have been left without a place to call home, Esperanza offers solace through her narratives where she securely positions them, where they will be remembered forever over the generations. The liminal space of the street thus by sharpening the creative potentials of the protagonist offers novel ways of recognition and acceptance that benefit the individual and the community.

Conclusion

Liminal spaces, be it physical, metaphorical or psychological, are spaces of alterations and associations, and for the same reason they could be analysed as spaces of introspection from where novel thoughts and actions emerge. An individual journeying through this space experiences and endures uncertainties, after which a gradual transformation occurs as a result of intense deliberations and realisations that transpire from the ambiguous circumstances. Through an analysis of Cisneros' Mango Street as a place of remembrances, realisations and retrievals for the Chicana folk, the paper attempted to examine various dimensions associated with the concept of liminality, that of observing liminal spaces as impermanent, fearful spaces, at the same time as renovating spaces that could be leveraged for character growth. Characters caught between diverse worlds navigate fluid and uncertain conditions of Mango Street finally to negotiate the in-between status marking their existence and thereby endeavouring to forge new identities. Liminal spaces though thus do not completely qualify as liveable spaces, inspire constructive changes and better understandings in the context of Chicana experiences.

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Tessa Jose
PhD Scholar
Institute of English
University of Kerala
Pin: 695034
India
Email: tessajose@keralauniversity.ac.in
Ph: +91 9497002614
ORCiD: 0009-0000-9546-8228