



In Search of “Self” in *The House on Mango Street*

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Acknowledgement

I must confess that working on a Masters dissertation was one of the toughest tasks I ever took up because it was on a contemporary writer like Sandra Cisneros who is not well known in this part of the world. Indeed, very few people here can provide information about her. It required a lot of patience, hard work, concentration and sleepless nights for me to finish this work. But with the blessings and love of Almighty, my parents, my beloved brother and my husband Iftikher I could complete this work successfully.

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Abstract

This dissertation studies Esperanza Cordero's search for a "self" that would establish herself as a writer. In her quest she found that she had to take some revolutionary steps to reach her goal. At the same time, she also understood that, leaving the marginalized Chicana women community behind and only self-development could not help her to find her real self. She realized that she must do something for them and found that writing their untold stories could be a way of paying her tribute to them. She is inspired by their pain, suppression and unfulfilled desires and takes the initiative to break fence of patriarchal control to assure women's right in her society. Thus she talks about establishing a sisterhood which would allow her and her fellow women to come out of confinement and find the route to freedom. In doing so she feels the necessity of "a room of her own" where she could think and write intimately. But her ethnic background and the socio-economic reality of the United States was not allowing her the space. This paper shows that Esperanza not only began searching for her 'self' but also for that space and her roots.

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Introduction

By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve my self-autonomy

- Gloria Anzaldua

This paper attempts to study Esperanza, the Chicana protagonist of Sandra Cisneros's novel *The House on Mango Street* who desires to acquire a room, that is to say a significant space in order to establish her identity as a woman and as a poet to represent the marginalized women of her community. She believes that she needs to come out of the role set aside for her by society to establish herself as a poet and to proclaim her true female identity. Cisneros's central character Esperanza searches for self-respect. In doing so she finds out the reasons behind confinement and the source of patriarchy's hold over women. She understands that social conditioning plays a vital role in holding women back. She also finds it important to acquire a "room" to display her talent. In searching for a room, she also searches for her identity as a Mexican -American and tries to create some space in literary tradition. She feels a strong desire to speak out for those women of her community who cannot come out of confinement. By writing the stories of the suppressed women of her neighborhood she feels she can create a bond with them and provide some space for them.

Esperanza, the protagonist of *The House on Mango Street*, is Cisneros's literary persona. Through Esperanza, Cisneros writes about what she sees, feels and encounters. Her biographer, Robin Ganz (1994) reports that when Cisneros was eleven, her family made a down-payment on their own home in Humboldt Park, Chicago. Most of their new neighbors were Puerto Ricans. Later, this neighborhood and its characters would become the inspiration for Cisneros's novel. Her response when asked about the autobiographical element of the work was as follows;

Yes! And, no! Or, as we say in Mexico, *sipero no*—Yes, but no. I mean that I write what I see, What's told to me that I feel very deeply, or what happened to me that I can't forget, but also what happened to others I love, or what strangers have told me happened to them, or what I read happened to others. I take all of these and cut and paste it together to make a story,

because in real life a story doesn't have shape, and it's the writer that gives it a beginning, a middle, and an end. (Ganz, 1994: 34)

From her personal experience of living in a minority community, Cisneros creates Esperanza as a narrator to depict the problems ethnic families, especially Hispanic ones, face in big cities. The hardship she faced as a poor Latino girl is expressed through her heroine.

Cisneros was born in Chicago, Illinois on December 20, 1954, the third child and only daughter in a family of seven children. Being the only daughter, she considered herself the "odd number in a set of men." (Ganz, 1994:19). Her father's name was Alfredo Cisneros de Moral and her mother was called Elvira Cordero Anguiano. Cisneros's father worked as an upholsterer to support his family and began "a compulsive circular migration between Chicago and Mexico City that became the dominating pattern of Cisneros's childhood." (Ganz, 1994:21). Being the only daughter in a rootless family, she felt herself isolated from her peers. Ganz notes that "Cisneros's childhood loneliness was instrumental in shaping her later passion for writing" (ibid). Cisneros's one strong female influence was her mother, Elvira. She was a voracious reader, more enlightened and socially conscious than her husband. According to Ganz, although Elvira was overly dependent on her husband and restricted in the opportunities available to her to fulfill her own potential, she ensured her daughter would not suffer from the same disadvantages (22). When Cisneros started living in Humboldt Park she befriended a high-school teacher who helped her write poems about the Vietnam War. With her teacher's encouragement she began to write and soon became well-known for her writing throughout her high-school years.

Cisneros was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree from Loyola University, Chicago in 1976. She received a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa in 1978. While attending the workshop she suddenly discovered that her particular social position gave her a unique location for writing. She soon discovered the differences between her and her classmates:

It wasn't as if I didn't know who I was. I knew I was a Mexican woman. But, I didn't think it had anything to do with why I felt so many imbalances in my life, whereas it had everything to do with it! My race, my gender, and my class! And it didn't make sense until that moment, sitting in that seminar. That's when I decided I would write about something my classmates couldn't write about. (Doyle, 1994: 6)

She realized that instead of being ashamed about her own cultural environment she should find it a source of her inspiration. From then on, she started writing about her "neighbors, the people she saw, the poverty that the women had gone through."(Dasenbrock, 1992: 302). Cisneros says about this moment:

So to me it began there, and that's when I intentionally started writing about all the things in my culture that were different from them — the poems that are these city voices — the first part of *Wicked Wicked Ways* - and the stories in *House on Mango Street*. I think it's ironic that at the moment when I was practically leaving an institution of learning, I began realizing in which ways institutions had failed me. (ibid)

Cisneros is well-known as an author and poet. The publication of *The House on Mango Street* in 1984 secured her a succession of Writer-in-Residence posts at universities in the United States. She taught creative writing at different institutions such as the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Michigan. Cisneros has also worked as a college recruiter and as an arts administrator.

Cisneros currently lives and writes in San Antonio, Texas. In 1990 when Pilar E. Rodríguez Aranda asked Cisneros in an interview for the *Americas Review* why she never married or started a family, Cisneros responded "I've never seen a marriage that is as happy as my living alone... My writing is my child and I don't want anything to come between us." (1990: 71–72). She has said that she enjoys living alone because it gives her time to think and write.

Cisneros's writing is often influenced by her personal experiences and observations of the people in her community. She once confessed to other writers at a conference in Santa Fe that she writes down "snippets of dialogue or monologue — records of conversations she hears wherever she goes."(Ganz,1994:26). These bits and pieces are then mixed and matched to create her stories. Her

biculturalism and bilingualism are also very important aspects of her writing. Cisneros's ability to speak two languages and to write about her two cultures gives her a unique position to tell not just her story, but the stories of those around her.

Claudia Sadowski-Smith has called Cisneros "perhaps the most famous Chicana writer"(2008:33). She has been acknowledged as a pioneer in her literary field as the first female Mexican-American writer to have her work published by a mainstream publisher. In 1989, *The House on Mango Street* was originally published by the small Hispanic publishing company Arte Público Press. The novel was reissued by Vintage Press; and in 1991 *Woman Hollering Creek*, her second novel was published by Random House.

As a pioneer Chicana author, Cisneros focused on a genre that had been at the margins of mainstream literature. With her first novel, *The House on Mango Street*, she moved away from the poetic style that was common in Chicana literature at that time and began to establish a "distinctive Chicana literary space"(Quintana 1996: 55). Quintana acknowledges Cisneros's contribution to Chicana feminist aesthetics by bringing women to the center of her narrative. She also shows her female characters as empowered protagonists in much of her work.

Literary critics have noted that Cisneros tackles complex theoretical and social issues through apparently simple characters and situations. For example, Ramón Saldívar (1990) observes that *The House on Mango Street* "represents from the simplicity of childhood vision, the enormously complex process of the construction of the gendered subject" (181). Cisneros's writing is rich for its symbolism and imagery; critic Deborah L Madsen (2000) thus considers her writing to be "both technically and aesthetically accomplished" while Cruz (2001) says that her technique of providing vivid social commentary "evokes highly personal responses" (915)

The House on Mango Street was published in 1984 and is Sandra Cisneros's first major work. The novel was born out of Cisneros's sudden feeling of being in an advantageous position of writing memories about homes and culture that are completely different from that of her peers. She terms this novel as her "first love". Writing in the voice of the adolescent Esperanza, Cisneros created a series of interlocking stories, which make a complete novel. At the same time the book is considered as a collection of prose poems because of the vivid and touching nature of the language. Most of the characters in the novel are not made up, for Cisneros writes about real people that she encountered in her life.

In *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros writes about conflicts directly related to her upbringing. Her work explores issues that are important to her such as feminism, love, oppression and religion. She also depicts cultural discrimination, feelings of alienation, and degradation associated with poverty.

Weaving together a series of vignettes or literary sketches, *The House on Mango Street* tells the coming of age story of Esperanza Cordero, a preadolescent Mexican American girl who lives in the United States. The novel opens with the description of Cordero's small and cramped family house on Mango Street. Despite its limitations, the house is an improvement from the family's previous apartments. This is the first house the family has owned. However, Esperanza does not like her new house which is in the center of a crowded Latino neighbourhood, because this is not what she dreamed of. She does not want to stay in her new house and is ashamed of it. But Mango Street has been her home and she attempts to understand the place. Mango Street is populated by people who have different stories of hope and despair to narrate.

After moving to her new neighborhood Esperanza matures in terms of age and experience. In the course of the novel we see that she develops friendship with teenage girls and studies them carefully for clues about becoming a woman. As she grows older she becomes trendy, develops her first crush and endures sexual assaults. All of these experiences help her to determine her focus of life;

ultimately, she finds writing as a vehicle to escape the harshness of reality and to create a world to which she can belong.

Esperanza gets a clear picture about the lives of Mexican women in the United States after she befriends the teenage girls of her new neighborhood. There is Marin from Puerto Rico who sells Avon cosmetics, takes care of her younger cousins and waits for a boyfriend whom she believes will change her life. There is Alicia who takes care of her family because her mother is dead. Despite her taught duty to take care of her siblings and father, she is determined to continue her studies. There is Esperanza's beautiful friend Sally, who in order to get away from her cruel father got married in the eighth grade and is now forbidden by her husband to leave the house. Rafaela's husband also locks her up in their apartment when he goes out. Apart from Alicia who works hard to establish herself, other young women of Mango Street dream of a prince who will rescue them from their confinement.

Esperanza, Nenny, Lucy, and Rachel discover early that the desire to act sexy like elderly girls of their community or like television models offers danger and not liberty. A neighbor gives them four pairs of heels. They march around the neighborhood acting like Cinderella until a homeless man offers them a kiss because they are looking attractive. Fleeing, the girls quickly take off the shoes and promise never to wear them again.

The grown women of Mango Street are less daring than teenage girls, but they too have acquired wisdom from experience. They advise Esperanza not to give up her independence in order to become a girlfriend or wife. Her Aunt Lupe, who was once pretty and strong but is now paralyzed and dying, encourages Esperanza to write poems. Her mother, who was once a good student, now regrets not finishing her school. Through interacting with her neighbors, Esperanza forms a connection with Mango Street. She develops a strong desire to do something for these women and finds writing their stories as the best solution. At the funeral of Rachel and Lucy's baby sister she meets their three old aunts who read her palms and her mind. They suggest that while she would go far in life she would have to remember to come back to Mango Street for others who do not have the ability to leave like

her. By the end of the novel Esperanza has realized that for her writing is a way of maintaining her relationship with Mango Street without sacrificing her independence. She will tell the stories of the ones who can not come out of confinement.

In terms of style, the novel is unique. Esperanza's story is organized in a series of vignettes which are not exactly either poetry or prose. This allows readers a certain level of intimacy with Esperanza. We are told what she thinks and what she feels at the most important time of her life. On the other hand, we lack some important information about her such as her exact age. While reading the novel readers find a sense of mystery as some information about the central character Esperanza are missing. Thus the different narrative styles and deliberate incorporation of mystery create an enormous effect on readers.

Though the novel "The House on Mango Street" depicts Esperanza Cordero's experiences of growing up and encountering reality, in this dissertation I will focus on Esperanza's sense of identity, her desire for a personal room and her decision to establish a sisterhood. As she grows up she identifies her feelings step by step and gradually understands that her ideas are linked together. In discussing Esperanza's search for identity in the United States where she is considered to be part of an ethnic minority, I will use Hall's (1916) essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" where he talks about the construction of identity in a diasporic situation. He says "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past." (112). Esperanza finds her source of self by looking at her past and her present where she is positioned and attempts to reconstruct her identity by positioning herself within her community. I will also be using Woolf's essays "A Room of One's Own" and "Professions for Women" to describe Esperanza's desire for space that is both physical and mental, necessary to establish herself as a writer. I will also take help from Luce Irigaray's essay "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother" where she discusses about the importance of establishing a sisterhood, that is to say a female genealogy to encounter patriarchy.

Esperanza's search for a house is a search for her identity. When she is ashamed of her house, she is ashamed of herself. Even toward the end of the book, she says her "real" house, which consists of her fantasies and images, exists only in a dream. In the end Esperanza finds strength to construct her identity and accept Mango Street as a part of her. As she grows up she wants a house where she can have some personal space to write. She has come to identify this space as a source of power. While searching for a perfect home and struggling to construct her identity, Esperanza feels that she has to take some responsibilities for the confined women of her locality. Esperanza realizes that even if she leaves Mango Street, she will continue to take responsibility for the women in her neighborhood. She feels the responsibility deeply and will not forget it. She finds a way of performing the responsibility through her writing.

Identity

The House on Mango Street (1984) is written based on a young girl's memories. The loosely knitted stories are the collection of Esperanza's memories where she searches for her identity and self-respect in an alienating and almost hostile world. As a Chicana woman in America she is already double marginalized. The double consciousness of her identity as Mexican-American, the racial tension she experiences, and the male domination she observes, accelerate her desire to establish her own identity as a woman and as a poet. Her craving for her own home, "Not a man's house. Not a daddy's" (Cisneros, 1984:108), is an expression of the need for all human beings for freedom and belonging.

The sensibility and feelings the narrator expresses about her relation to the world and people around her confirm her search for identity as a part of the tradition of coming of age. Esperanza's anxiety of living in Mango Street is the struggle between what she is and what she wants to be. *The House on Mango Street* captures both the narrator's interior and exterior worlds. We come to know that Esperanza's alienation stems from her Mexican ethnicity and hyphenated culture. She experiences cultural abuse; at the same time she is surrounded by defeated and worn-out women of the Mexican American community. However, she wants to free herself from all these barriers. As she reaches adolescence, she gradually discovers the meaning of being a woman and a Mexican in America. At the same time, she also discovers her true self and her desires and learns that she belongs to herself, to other members of her community, and not to a place. She ultimately finds that writing can make her dreams come true.

Esperanza's desire for a picture-perfect house originates in her family's wondering nature. She always dreams of a beautiful house with "a great big yard", "running waters and pipe that worked, and "at least three wash rooms"(Cisneros,1984:4). From the narrator's description it becomes clear that the family's experience of living in rented houses was not good as they had to "share the yard with the people downstairs"(3) and had to be "careful not to make too much noises"(3). Nevertheless,

Esperanza does not like the new house. The house her parents bought on Mango Street does not match with the description of the house her parents promised her and her siblings before they went to bed.

Indeed, this is the last house they would have liked to live in. She says:

But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it at all. It's small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath and the house has only one washroom. Everybody has to share a bedroom—Mama and Papa, Carlos and Kiki, Me and Nenny. (Cisneros, 1984:4)

This house is just the opposite of what she has been told they would be getting. This contrast between expectation and reality stimulates her to construct a house of her own. Eysturoy says -

In this initial story, homonymous with the novel itself, that the narrating "I" becomes aware of her own subjective perceptions as she begins to differentiate between family dreams and social realities and becomes conscious of her parents' inability to fulfill their promises of the perfect house.(Eysturoy, 2010:62)

Esperanza had once been humiliated by a nun from her school where her family was living in a similar house. As she was asked by the nun about her home, she pointed at their shabby-looking house on the third floor. The nun's immediate reaction then disturbed her. The nun's sarcastic manner of saying "you live *there*" (Cisneros, 1984:5) clearly underscored the poverty-stricken condition of the house. Her expression made Esperanza "feel like nothing" (5). Her parents' new house on Mango Street reminds her about the past humiliation. The new house becomes to her a symbol of poverty and shame that threatens her self-perception.

Esperanza does not like the house her parents bought for the family. They try to console their children by saying that this is not the end of their moving; it is a "temporary move", "for the time being", (Cisneros, 1984:5) a stop on the way to the dream house. The narrator knows the harsh reality though; her parents could not afford a dream house where grass grows "without a fence" (4). But the narrator does not give up her dream of attaining the desired house. She would not compromise her dreams and would regain her self-esteem because she is the "grass" on the big yard that grows

“without a fence” (4). She believes that she must be true to herself to gain self- respect without support.

Esperanza’s search for individual identity and freedom is apparent from the very beginning of the novel. Not only does she show her dislike for the house on Mango Street as it does not match her dream house, she also expresses her dissatisfaction with her name. Her friends at school find it funny “as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth” (Cisneros, 1984:11). She wishes to have a fashionable name which her friends would not dare make fun of and be envious. She says, “I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do.”(Cisneros, 1984:11). She wished to have a new name since decoding the meaning of her name would lead her to a new language and cultural context. According to Eysturoy (2010), “Her name is thus a sign of a complex bicultural context that requires her to negotiate among opposing cultural meanings to come to terms with her own self”(66). Her preference for a peculiar name like Zeze the X indicates that she wanted a name that carried no contradictory cultural connotation.

Esperanza feels that her name does not match her personality. We come to know that her name represents contradictory meanings in different languages (English and Spanish). Also, the sad past of her namesake depress her. She is named after her great grandmother who was “a wild horse of a woman” (Cisneros, 1984:11) though she had to spend a lifetime looking out the window, “the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow” (11). This was a kind of revenge she took against her husband’s action of throwing “a sack over her head to carry her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier” (11). Throughout her life she could not accept her forceful marriage and failure of “becoming the things” (11) she wanted to be. Though Esperanza gets her great grandmother’s name, she does not want to “inherit her place by the window” (11) and end up as a failure. She finds that in English her name means hope but in Spanish it means sadness and waiting. She refuses to be stuck in a sad life, one in which waiting prevails like her great grandmother’s. She is a girl who believes in

action and searches for ways of attaining freedom and success. That is why she would like to baptize herself under a new name which she believes will allow her to attain self-determination and identity.

The inexperienced and adolescent Esperanza's illusion about having a new fashionable name expresses her dilemma at being caught between her present condition and what she would like to be. Her desire to leave Mango Street in order to have a house of her own becomes clearer in the chapter "Four Skinny Trees". The four skinny trees which are visible from Esperanza's bedroom are metaphors of her condition. They have skinny necks and pointed elbows like the narrator and these "Four raggedy excuses planted by the city" (Cisneros, 1984:74) are symbols of Esperanza's condition in her father's house on Mango Street. Like the trees she doesn't belong here, although she has a physical presence. Skinny trees teach her how to survive in a hostile environment. She learns the truth of existence from the trees; as she says, "Let one forget his reason for being, they'd all droop like tulips in a glass, each with their arms around the other." (74). She comes to know that she has to survive with her feeling of not belonging to reach the place where she belongs. Her alienation creates her desire to find her own home where she could have her real identity and where she could grow up healthy. Valdes (2010) in her essay "In Search of Identity in Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*" says "Esperanza's survival amidst surroundings that are negative and her rejection of her environs is not a denial of where she is and who she is, but rather a continuous fight to survive in spite of Mango Street as the Esperanza from Mango Street. At a symbolic level the secret of survival is revealed to Esperanza which teaches her to quest for her identity." (61)

Esperanza's sense of belonging and not belonging gets a new turn when she meets three sisters from Mexico. The three sisters emerge as a fairy godmother to Esperanza. The appearance of the three sisters in the novel serves a special purpose for the heroine. They present a remarkable gift, the gift of self: "When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are" (Cisneros, 1984:105). The three sisters speak to Esperanza and through their

speeches they evoke her spirit of storytelling which ultimately leads her to identity and freedom.

Valdes (2010) observes:

At the level of plot the sisters serve as revelation. They are the narrative mediators that enter the story, at the crucial junctures, to assist the heroine in the trail that lies ahead. It is significant that they are from Mexico and appear to be related only to the moon. In pre-Hispanic Mexico, the lunar goddesses, such as Tlazolteotl and Xochiquetzal, were in the intermediaries for all women (Westheim105). They are sisters to each other and, as women sisters to Esperanza. One has laughter like tin, another has the eyes of a cat and the third hands like porcelain. This image is, above all, a lyrical disclosure of revelation. There entrance into the story is almost magical. At the symbolic level, the three sisters are linked with Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, the three fates. The tradition of the sisters of fate runs deep in Western literature from the most elevated lyric to the popular tale of marriage, birth and the fate awaiting the hero of heroine. In Cisneros's text, the prophesy of the fates turns to the evocation of self knowledge.

(Valdes, 2010: 11-12)

Like fairy tale godmothers, the three sisters help Esperanza find her identity. They advice her to remember who she is and where she is from since the rejection of her past may lead her away from self-knowledge. In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Hall (1996) says "identities are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (112). Her self-knowledge about her past and present will shape her identity through her story telling. She is blessed with the power of writing and thus has the opportunity to re-tell her past. Her power of writing will allow her to find 'a new identity', something she is desperate to have. The three sisters understood this quest since they feel "she's special" (Cisneros 1984:104) and guide her to the right way by stressing the importance of self-knowledge. However, their prophesy, "yes, she'll go very far" (103) becomes true when she is be able to retell her past and when she makes a metaphoric return to Mango Street, where she was positioned by her past.

The word 'house' has a specific resonance for Esperanza. To her a house is not only a place to live, eat and sleep but a place to belong and to bloom. We come across constant comparisons between the house on the Mango Street where she lives and her dream house. Valdes observs –

The imagery of the house is in a constant flux between a negative and a positive, between the house the narrator has and the one she would like to have. On the level of the narrative voice's sense of belonging and identity, it is clear from the first place that the house is much more than

a place to live. It is a reflection, an extension, a personified world that is indistinguishable from the occupant” (Valdes, 2010:12)

Esperanza’s dream house becomes the extension of her own persona. She deliberately denies the existence of her present house to one of her friends and reveals to her that she never developed any feeling of belonging for the house:

No, this isn’t my house I say and shake my head as if shaking could undo the year I’ve lived here. I don’t belong. I don’t even want to come from here..... I never had a house, not even a photograph... only one I dream of. (Cisneros, 1984:106)

She knows that she doesn’t belong to the hostile ugly world she lives in. Her rejection of the house on Mango Street is a rejection of social confinement and cultural hostility.

The chapter “Bums in the Attic” illustrates Esperanza’s dream and sorrow about her desired house. She wants “a house on a hill like the ones with the gardens” (Cisneros 1984:86) where her father works. She used to visit the house on holidays but now she feels ashamed to go there since “all of us staring out the window like the hungry. I am tired of looking at what we can’t have” (86). Still, she is optimistic about having her own house where she will offer ‘Bums’ (vagabonds) a place to come in and stay. She describes her dream house as a place of wish- fulfillment. The chapter “A House of My Own” expands the threshold of the promised house of her dream, evoking Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* intertextually. Esperanza feels as she grows up that the interior of the house is more important than the exterior: “Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem” (Cisneros 1984:108). Her description of the dream house changes at the end of the novel and she describes her dream house not as a luxurious one with gardens on the hills but a place where her “pretty purple petunias” “two shoes waiting beside the bed” and her “books and stories” (108) invite her to write down her unwritten stories. Valdes (2010) says “the house is now a metaphor for the subject and, the personal space of her identity” (12). The described house is the symbol of her self-defined identity through discovering her power of writing. In this last piece she resolves the tension between her father’s house and her dream house by transforming it into writing.

At the symbolic level, Esperanza's dream house embodies her existence. This is the house where she wants to belong as she feels that the house on Mango Street does not reflect her presence. But the problem is that the rejection of her presence in Mango Street will be the rejection of herself and of her identity. Hall (1996) says that cultural identity "is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past" (12). Her identity will gain strength when she will learn to retell her past through the act of writing since her future identity of 'being' depends on her past, that is to say; her ethnic root. Her power of writing will help her gain control over her gloomy past and will create a future where she will be free and to which she can belong. Valdes (2010) says "Mango Street will always be part of this woman, but she has taken the strength of trees unto her self and has found the courage to be the house of her dreams, her own self- invention" (15). As a Mexican American, her lesson of survival and winning freedom through the self- invention of writing is a movement towards nonconformity and a protest against mainstream culture and patriarchal narration.

Room

The House on Mango Street is set in a contemporary Latino neighborhood in an American city. The loosely structured forty-four interrelated stories of the novel are narrated by the protagonist Esperanza from her own perception of her socio-cultural context. She describes her neighborhood, its people, their lives and how this social context and surroundings have a close relation with her evolving consciousness about her identity as a woman and as a Chicana. In fact, Eysturoy (2010) describes Esperanza's process of development as a writer within the community of Mango Street as "a portrait of the artist as a young woman" (2010:62)

In her famous book *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Virginia Woolf explains the effects of economic deprivation on women's literature and focuses on the importance of constructing a female literary tradition. Cisneros's Esperanza is one of those women who wishes to carry this legacy onward, regardless of all the barriers she was facing in America as a Mexican woman. The first obstacle she has to face is her ethnic background. Being part of an ethnic minority in the United States, she is double marginalized. Nevertheless, despite the barriers she faces in the process of becoming a writer, she decides to affirm her ethnicity by returning to her past, that is to say, to Mango Street. In course of her search for her own room both in her house and in literature she promises to serve the women whom she is surrounded and loved by.

In her series of vignettes, Esperanza yearns for a personal space, a private sphere. Her thirst for "a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem" (Cisneros, 1984:108); echoes Virginia Woolf's declaration of the importance of a private room for a woman to develop her creativity. Esperanza's urge is "Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a Daddy's. A house all my own... My books and my stories. Nobody's garbage to pick up after" (Cisneros, 1984:108). The room she lives in with her younger sister Nanny is in a house that is shabby and small. The windows of her father's house are "so small you'd think they were holding their breath" (Cisneros, 1984:4). According to literary critic Cirlot, breathing is a process through which one inhales spiritual power.

Esperanza's description of the house as not breathing represents the spiritual suffocation she suffers in her parents' house. Olivares points out that this description of the house is "a metonymical description and presentation of self" (162). As a young writer she feels choked in the little space that has been provided for her by her family.

The old fashioned and worn-out houses Esperanza has lived in with her father, mother, sister and brothers, including the house on Mango Street, represent her poverty, but they also provide her with a handful of rich stories. The socio-economic condition, the Mexican culture and the neglected women she is surrounded by become her subjects. The story of her namesake and the lonely skinny trees in front of her bedroom inspire her and help her bloom. The only thing she needs is a private space, a room of her own. Like Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own* Esperanza, is on the look out. As an aspiring writer, Esperanza recognizes the importance of having her very own personal space.

In her essay "Professions for Women", Woolf (1964) comments on the "angel in the House" who has to sacrifice every bit of comfort and assume responsibilities both physical and mental for daily living and for the maintenance of her family. She argues that if a woman wants to develop her creativity as a writer she has to kill the "angel" in the house who deliberately accepts all the household chores as her essential responsibility. She says that this "angel in the house" continuously interrupts woman's individual creativity and distracts her from what she would really like to do. Woolf suggests that the woman writer must kill that "angel" for the sake of her writing.

Cisneros understands the importance of Woolf's belief in killing the angel and the necessity of a separate space for a woman as an essential precondition for writing. Her understanding of Woolf's belief is clear in her characterization of Esperanza. Not only does Esperanza search for her own room, she also attempts to kill the "angel in the house": "I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate" (Cisneros, 1984:89). She decides not to grow up tame like the girls she sees around her. She wants to grow like "grass growing without a fence" (44). In "A

house of my own” Esperanza describes her ideal house where she would create without the tension of cleaning anybody’s garbage. She wishes for a house “quite as snow, a space for myself to go” (108) and compares her house with a clean piece of paper which is waiting for a poem to be written. This comparison between a house and the cleanness of a paper clearly declares Esperanza’s desire for a personal space to display her talent without any conventional responsibility.

A separate room, and a space made intimate, can have an immense effect on a writer, stimulating her creativity and helping her decide on the subject matter. A room of one’s own is a primal need for an artist. Woolf suggests that leisure, money and a personal room enable a woman to become a writer. Toni Morrison also comments on the intimacy a woman has with her house and her “strong sense of being in a room, a place or a house” (Stepito, 1979:213). In an interview she says “Sometimes my relationship to things in a house would be a little different from, say my brother’s or my father’s or my son’s” (ibid). She further notes, “I clean them and I move them and I do every intimate things ‘in place’: I am sort of rooted in it, so that writing about being in a room looking out, or being in a world looking out, or liking in a small definite place, is probably very common among most women anyway ”(ibid). Olsen has also described the sort of relationship a woman bears with her family in her everyday life. According to Olson (1978), habits of taking responsibilities, responding to others and shifting attention from herself to others become a part of a woman since she practices them for years (39). This domestic domain arouses different kinds of responses in women writers. We can appreciate Esperanza’s reasons behind searching for her own place with pillows and petunias, books and stores and shoes waiting for her beside the bed. Her personal attachment with the things in her room helps her to give shape to her stories by evoking her artistic sense in a friendly and comfortable environment.

The dilapidated relationships women carry within their homes influence Esperanza to recognize the importance of having a personal space. Her own great-grandmother who was unhappily married lived her whole life by looking “out of the window...the way so many women sit their sadness

on an elbow” (Cisneros, 1984:11). Her mother, despite having talent and brains, ended up being a housewife and cooking oatmeal everyday. She advises her to continue her journey: “go to take care all your own” (91). Most of her female friends and neighbors have either experienced domestic violence or failed to achieve their goals. For example, Ruthie a good whistler, likes to play, dance and sing but got married to a husband no one ever saw. Esperanza claims “There were many things Ruthie could have been if she wanted to” (68-69) but she preferred living with her mother and waiting for her husband to come and take her home. Louie’s cousin Marin could not come out because she “gotta baby-sit with Louie’s sisters –but she stands in the doorway a lot” (23). She can’t come out of the house until her aunt returns from work “and even then she can only stay out in front” (27). Mamacita lives across the road on third floor and is afraid of speaking English, she “sits all day by the window and plays the Spanish radio show” (77). Rafaela’s husband locks her up indoor when he goes to play dominoes because she is beautiful and he is afraid that she will run away. As Esperanza notes, “Rafaela who is still young but getting old from leaning out the window so much” (79). Sally’s father doesn’t allow her to go out and beats her when he thinks of his sister who had run away. Minarva writes poems and is “little bit older than” Esperanza “but already she has two kids and a husband who left” (84).

Most of the women in Mango Street are entrapped within the threshold of their own houses. Many of them dropped out from college and are now governed by their father’s or husband’s orders. In the chapter “Alicia Who Sees Mice” Esperanza tells her friend Alicia’s story. Alicia is the only girl in her community studying at a university. Her mother died and there is nobody else in her family who can help her in her household chores. She studies till late at night and wakes up early and then makes her lunch and takes two trains and a bus to go to her university. She works hard “because she doesn’t want to spend her whole life in a factory or behind a rolling pin” (Cisneros, 1984; 32), which she inherited from her mother. She is the only one whose dream matches with that of Esperanza’s. Both of them wish to escape the congested socio-economic and socio-cultural ambience of Mango Street

where they hardly have any scope to fulfill their dreams. Esperanza explains that poverty and absence of a caretaker are not the only obstacles that come in Alicia's way to success; she is also afraid of "four-legged fur" mice that do not exist "and fathers" (32). Alicia's father appears to be a loving parent but when Alicia complains of mice he insists that those were creatures of her imagination. Instead of making the house mice-free, her father rejects her fear as fanciful imagination. Alicia has to accept her father's decision without any argument as she is afraid of him too.

There are plenty of reasons behind Alicia's fear of a loving father. Girls like Esperanza and Alicia who continuously search for an identity of their own experience domestic violence as a part of their everyday lives either at home or in the neighborhood. Sally's father doesn't allow her to go out and to talk to boys because she is beautiful. He is afraid that she will run away like his sister and beats her whenever he finds her talking to boys: "He just went crazy, he just forgot he was her father between the buckle and the belt" (Cisneros, 1984; 92). Rafaela wishes to come out of the "bitter room" (80) where her husband locks her up when he goes out because she is beautiful. Minarva "comes over black and blue" (85) from her husband's house the very next week she went there. Later, when Sally runs away and gets married she experiences the same act of aggression when her husband beats her and locks her up in a room. Esperanza explains that, "Mexicans don't like their women strong" (10), and so male members in Mexican families always suppress women, as if to confirm their superiority. The women of Mango Street are well aware of such practices, and so it is natural for Alicia to be afraid of a father who could be nice at one moment but turn into a monster the next. Alicia and Esperanza look for a room where they could free their souls and establish their identities without being afraid of any monster.

In their essay "Mad Woman in the Attic" Gilbert and Gubar (1998), list the man-made myths that represent women as extremes "Ghost, fiend and angel, fairy, witch and spirit" (813). Some myths require women to be selfless, submissive and modest. Gilbert and Gubar argue that "a woman is denied autonomy—the subjectivity—that the pen represents" (814). Women in Mango Street accept

the “mythical mask(s)” that male- dominated society fastens over their faces. They try hard to be selfless and agree to accept subjugation but the truth is that they cannot find the heavenly happiness for which they would sacrifice their ‘self’. To do so, Sally and Rafaela get a room where they are locked up while Minarva and Rosa Vargas are abandoned by their husbands. None get the desired freedom or room they hope for. These Chicana women are deprived of the primal needs of all human being: the need for freedom and the space for creativity. They struggle to survive in a society where their realities are constructed and controlled by males. They live in a condition where their ‘self’ autonomy and individual identities are denied. Minarva tries to write poems “in little pieces of paper” (Cisneros, 1984: 84) when her children are asleep. Her only reader is Esperanza but before she lets her read her work she folds it over and over and “holds it in her hands a long time, little pieces of paper that smell like dime” (84). But writing does not help her to get the desired freedom as she cannot be desperate like Esperanza and come out of the trap that her husband and society have set for her.

Esperanza feels the existence of a social trap from early adolescence and does not want to get caught in it. Matchie (2010) describes Esperanza as different from the other women in the text. She says “she has learned from them and not made the mistakes. So she is not trapped like her mother, Alicia, or Sally, or others” (59). Esperanza refuses to grow tame like many others “who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain”(Cisneros, 1984; 88) instead, she “grew despite concrete” (75). The motif of her journey is to find her own freedom, her intimate space, and her personal room.

Sisterhood

The forty-four vignettes of *The House on Mango Street* (1984) describe measurable and haunting images of women in a Mexican community in America. We come across many entrapped women: a young woman who is locked up in her home because her husband fears that she would run away since she is “too beautiful to look at” (Cisneros, 1984: 79); a young girl who cannot come out of home and comes to school with marks all over her because her father beats her as he thinks she will elope; a young woman pursuing dreams of higher education with fears of “four-legged fur. And fathers.”(32), and women who “sit their sadness on an elbow” (11) and wish for different lives. These stark realities of women living on Mango Street are shaped by male customs, behavior and violence. Through her central character Esperanza, a young girl who lives in a working class Latino neighborhood in Chicago, Cisneros tells us about the sufferings of women in such an environment, but she also shows vibrant women with imaginative and inventive attitudes who try to alter their realities and search for a new space.

In an interview Cisneros has said that in her work she writes against the stereotypes circulating about Latinas and focuses on the “fierce” nature of women who are strong despite adversity. She says—

I have to say that the traditional role is kind of a myth. I think that the traditional Mexican woman is a fierce woman. There’s a lot of victimization but we are also fierce. We are very fierce. Our mothers had been fierce. Our women may be victimized but they are still very, very fierce and very strong. I really do believe that.

(Jussawalla & Dasenbrock, 1992; 300)

Esperanza, the protagonist of Cisneros’s novel *The House on Mango Street*, is one such “fierce woman”, full of optimism but conscious of the limitations male-constructed society places on her and the women around her. In her continuous struggle to construct a new space and open up possibilities for herself, she speaks up for the confined women attempting to find routes to freedom.

Virginia Woolf (1957) advised women to “think back through our mothers” (79) in order to establish a literary canon in women’s literature. In her essay “The Bodily Encounter with the Mother” Irigaray (2000) offers the same advice. She questions the validity of a culture and a society where

people forget their mother's contribution and marginalize and suppress them. She also wonders about the social conditioning of a man that lets him forget his mother: "he should make progress, advance, go outside and forget her" (418). She questions the representation of mothers; in other words, the representation of women in western culture: "And the relationship with the placenta, the first house to surround us, whose halo we carry with us everywhere, like some child's security blanket, how is that represented in our culture?" (ibid).

Yet, young Esperanza had found safety in her mother's lap. In the chapter, "Hairs", while describing her family members' hair, she praises her mother's ones that look like "little candy circles all curly and pretty because she pinned it in pin curls all day" (Cisneros, 1984:6). She breathes the sweet smell of her mother's hair when her mother holds her close: "holding you and you feel safe, is the warm smell of bread before you bake it, is the smell when she makes room for you on her side of the bed still warm with her skin" (6-7). She finds the room her mother makes for her on her side the safest place in the world and gets her inspiration from it. Her subjective description of "I" becomes a collective "you" in the course of narration as a mother's lap is the most secure shelter for a child. She understands this universal truth before she gets corrupted by established male dominated socio-cultural norms.

Woolf's statement "think back through our mother's" to establish a sisterhood (1957: 79) surely encourages Cisneros and this encouragement is evident in the chapter "A Smart Cookie". By 'mother's' Woolf means the neglected female poets and authors of the literary tradition. For Cisneros's these mothers are not only the poet or author-mothers that Woolf suggests but also the mothers she came into close contact with in her everyday life. Doyler (2010) says that "for both Alice Walker and Sandra Cisneros, these mothers include women outside the "tradition"" (25). These anonymous mothers outside the "tradition" continuously "handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see" (Walker, 1983; 240).

Esperanza's mother's "encouragement" (Doyle, 2010; 24) guided her development as an artist. "A Smart Cookie" opens with the mother's advice to her daughter "I could have been somebody, you know?" (Cisneros, 1984; 90) she goes on to say "Esperanza, you go to school. Study hard.....Go to take care all your own" (91). Esperanza's mother wishes her to be the somebody that she herself could not become. Esperanza's tribute to her mother starts with a list of her talents, "She can speak two languages. She can sing an opera. She knows how to fix a T.V....She used to draw when she had time" (90) and ends with a list of her unfulfilled desires: "Some day she would like to go to the ballet. Some day she would like to see a play" (90). She does not want her daughter to inherit her fate or the fates of her *comaders*, women like "Izaura whose husband left and Yolanda whose husband is dead" (91). Esperanza's mother's advice acts as a guiding force in shaping and developing her future which Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1985) sees as a "specific biographical drama that has entered and shaped a *kunstlerromane* by women": "Such a narrative is engaged with a maternal figure and.....is often compensatory for her losses The daughter becomes an artist to extend, reveal, and elaborate her mother's often thwarted talents" (91).

Esperanza tries to link her rebellious desire of writing against the grain to represent the fate of women constrained by male brutality in her culture, echoing her great-grandmother's rebellion against her husband's forceful marriage and against the social conformity of women's confinement. The grandmother had rejected her marriage "And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window all her life" (Cisneros, 1984:11). Esperanza is named after her Mexican great-grandmother; she also inherits her rebellious spirit and is linked through her with her cultural past, "to her identity as a woman within a particular socio-cultural context." (Eysturoy, 2010:67). However, although her great-grandmother was a strong and rebellious woman she would protest against her confinement silently and had to accept patriarchal control. This makes Esperanza conscious of the position she holds up as a woman in her cultural framework. She understands that this framework prevented her great-grandmother from being "all the things she wanted to be" (Cisneros, 1984:11). Esperanza is

given her great-grandmother's name. However, she decides to be even more rebellious since she does not want to inherit her great-grandmother's fate; as she puts it, "Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (ibid). Eysturoy (2010) notes "Esperanza links her great-grandmother's fate, her confinement, her sadness and lost hope, with her own name, that is, her self, making her name tantamount to her culture's definitions of gender roles" (67). Like her great-grandmother, she will not adapt the role that her culture fixes for her. She refuses to accept "a heritage of female confinement" (ibid) and carries a legacy of rebellion against patriarchal confinement and control.

Another inspiration for Esperanza is her aunt, Guadalupe who encouraged her when she was a young poet. She listened to every poem that Esperanza wrote, even if they were very premature and childish. She understood the desire of this budding poet for freedom and was concerned about her exhausted soul within the congested socio-economic condition. Esperanza's tribute to her pretty aunt "Born Bad" tells us that aunt Lupe was once a strong swimmer whom she had admired for her strength before she became paralyzed and blind: "Hard to imagine her legs once strong, the bones hard and parting water, clean sharp strokes, not bent wrinkled like a baby, not drawing under the sticky yellow light" (Cisneros, 1984: 58). Even when she became very sick and almost blind, she would ask her niece and her friends to come and visit her. As Esperanza notes "We liked my aunt. She listened to our stories. She always asked us to come back" (Cisneros, 1984: 60). Esperanza also liked to visit her as she could express her poetic self to aunt Lupe without any fear of being criticized: "She listened to every book, every poem I read her. One day I read her one of my own" (ibid). Aunt Lupe cheered her and complimented her "That's nice. That's very good" (61). Her advice to her young niece was as follows: "You must remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free." (ibid) helps her to focus on her poetic spirit. She confesses that at that moment she didn't understand what she had tried to say, but as Esperanza grew up she found that all her desires to tell stories and give shape to what she saw came from her aunt's inspiration. Aunt Lupe stimulated her

inner spirit and she feels that it is her duty to write about her aunt, and to tell everybody how she found her bond of sisterhood with the women she would meet.

In her essay “The Bodily Encounter with the Mother” Irigaray says that we must recall our “umbilical bond” (2000:420) with our mothers: “if it respected the life of the mother—of the mother in all women, of the women in all mothers—reproduce the living bond with her ” (ibid). She calls this process of remembering our bond with our mother as a “rebirth”, something she believes is necessary for every woman. Esperanza unknowingly did so by accepting her aunt’s advice and expresses her gratefulness through her writing. She finds it important to recall her relations with the women of her community. Not only did she strive to establish her “umbilical bond” with her cultural mother and co-mothers in the manner that Irigaray suggests, she also finds it necessary to talk for them, to talk on behalf of them, and to acknowledge the sadness that they themselves could not talk about.

The friendship between Esperanza and Sally in *The House on Mango Street* helps Esperanza to explore the mythical lies of womanhood that prevent woman’s progress. Esperanza admires her friend Sally because she had “eyes like Egypt and nylons the color of smoke” (Cisneros, 1984, 81). The adventure of having a different eye color which makes her look attractive becomes a dangerous obstacle for her life; as her father says, “to be this beautiful is trouble” (ibid). She had been physically abused by her father. She endures the cruel gossip of the boys in the coatroom and had an unhappy marriage even before she had reached eighth grade. She eloped with a marshmallow salesman whom she had met at a school bazaar. Though Sally says she is in love, sensible Esperanza guesses why she really eloped; “she did it to escape” (Cisneros, 1984:101). She understands her friend Sally more than Sally’s father does his own daughter. She wishes Sally a beautiful home with flowers and windows where all the sky would come into her room. She would have Sally escape the cruel reality of Mango Street but not in the manner she had chosen to do so. She knows that Sally’s elopement could not help her to escape the kind of male brutality which she experienced in her father’s home or enable her to acquire the freedom she longs for. Although Esperanza tries to help Sally, the latter refuses her help

since she had already accepted the male-defined “women’s function and social role” (Irigaray, 2000:415). When Sally refuses Esperanza’s attempt to “save” her from Tito and his friends who have entrapped her in a situation where she must kiss each of them to get her key back, Esperanza feels betrayed. Doyle (2010) says “the grief-stricken Esperanza loses the Edenic innocence of her girlhood” (30):

“I looked at my feet in their socks and ugly round shoes. They seemed far away. They didn’t seem to be my feet anymore. And the garden that had been such a good place to play didn’t seem mine either”

(Cisneros, 1984:98).

She understands that Sally has conceded to patriarchal domination.

Sally had wished for a fairy tale escape where her marshmallow salesman prince would snatch her from her monstrous father and where all her poverty and sadness would have gone. In contrast to Esperanza, Sally does not understand that such fairy tales are basically concocted by men to dominate women. Sally falls in a trap; she allows Tito and his friend to kiss her in return for her key and ends up marrying a person who does not allow her to talk on the phone or “let her look out the window” (Cisneros, 1984:101). As a close observer of the tension between social reality and women’s condition, Esperanza finds that “all the books and magazines, everything that told it wrong” (100). She understands at a very young age that the luck of Mango Street women would never change as long as they believed in the false promises made by men about marriage and courtship. She recognizes that marriage could not be a way out of the harsh realities of Mango Street since she had seen the lives of her fellow women being controlled by their husbands. Along with her friends and sister she had tried to be “Cinderella” by wearing a lady’s high heel. They had cheered “Hurray! Today we are Cinderella because our feet fit exactly” (40), but their excitement at being Cinderella turned into a violent experience as they encountered a drunken “bum man” who offered to kiss them. Then they refused his kiss and became tired of pretending to be beautiful. They came to know that physical beauty offers nothing but the kind of sexual assurance which provides no freedom or space.

The male figures in most of Esperanza's story are either threatening or absent (Doyle, 2010: 31). Either they perform their duties as guardians perfectly by keeping the women under control or evade their duties, leaving them to their women. Sally's father beats her and makes sure she does not talk to the boys. Later, her husband forbids her from going out of the house without his permission. Rafael's husband keeps her under lock and key and only allows her to look out through the window. None of them are allowed to socialize in absence of their guardians who are either their fathers or husbands. On the contrary, Minerva's "mother raised her kids alone and it looks like her daughter will go that way too" (Cisneros, 1984: 84). Minerva herself has two children and her husband "left and keeps leaving" (84). Edna's daughter Ruthie stays with her mother and sleeps on a couch in her living room. She says "she's just visiting and next weekend her husband's gonna come back to take her home, but the weekends come and go and Ruthie stays." (69). One of Esperanza's godmothers' husbands had left and the other had died. Esperanza observes that these women are entrapped by patriarchal society and imprisoned by their "princes". She portrays the beastly nature of the "princes" and shows how they repress women. She feels it necessary to re-think the issue of violence done to women and to make them aware of their condition.

In *Mango Street* "most of the women yearn for different endings" (Doyle, 2010: 31). They long for a different life and try to find ways of escaping from confinement. Minerva writes poems secretly when her children are asleep. She shows her poems, written on small pieces of paper, to Esperanza. She takes a short escape from her "unlucky" (Cisneros, 1984: 84) life by writing them. From her locked room Rafaela lowers a paper shopping bag on the clothesline on Tuesdays not unlike Rapunzel who let down her hair so that children could send the papaya or coconut juice that she had asked for. She wishes for a sweeter drink, "not bitter like an empty room, but sweet like the island, like the dance hall down the street where women much older than her throw green eyes easily like dice and open homes with keys." (80). Like Rapunzel's long hair, the shopping bag on the clotheline is her only way of communicating with the outer world. It allows her some consolation, some scope to meet

“someone offering sweeter drinks” (ibid). Marin also wishes for a silver string—a job downtown, nice clothes and “someone in the subway who might marry you and take you to live in a big house far away.” (26).

Esperanza is very different from the other women represented in the novel. She has learnt from their conditions and is careful to avoid their mistakes. She refuses to be entrapped and imprisoned like her mother, grandmother, Alicia, Sally, Raphaela or the others. Being different from these women, Esperanza understands that women’s life in Mango Street will never change until they themselves become aware of their condition and learn to fight for their rights. She feels that her act of writing can be a way of liberating the women around her from “the tyrannies of male houses and male plots.” (Doyle, 2010: 33). In return for their love and company she intends to ask for justice on their behalf.

Conclusion

Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* is a fictional autobiography of Esperanza Cordero. The text is about self-invention through writing. She tries to achieve the ability to resist patriarchal society and asserts herself through her writing. She lives in a Mexican-American culture where she finds subjugation and the silence that they had to contend with.

Cisneros's Esperanza attempts to avoid patriarchal construction through self-invention. She consciously avoids the influence of man-made myths about women in her life. She desperately searches for her identity, trying to locate and reconstruct it. She urges for a room where she can breathe and explore life. She dares to cross the line set by society and attempts to free women entrapped in patriarchal narratives. Through her writing, Esperanza intends to narrate not only the story of her own artistic development but the stories of women around her. Like Cisneros, Esperanza will free them through her writing. She derives strength and encouragement from their lives and struggles to establish her real "self".

Esperanza's realization of the danger of social confinement and her search for her real self act as a motivational force for all women. Cisneros not only tries to underscore the thoughtful insight of Esperanza but also provides her with ways of questioning patriarchal authority. Through her famous creation Esperanza, Cisneros gives us pointers that can help us identify the patriarchal hegemonic sphere that actively works to ensure women's imprisonment. Cisneros's work not only re-contextualizes the social myth of Cinderella but also tries to unveil the forces underlying cultural practices throughout the world, regardless of time and space. Cisneros exposes the logic beneath the creation of puzzling universal symbols of women, and in the process she provides us the opportunity to review our understanding of human psychology. *The House on Mango Street* encourages us not to read the Cinderella story in the traditional manner. Esperanza offers us to look for the holes, to find out in whose hand our fates are created. She proposes to take control of our own souls and let it not be dominated by others.

Esperanza's thoughts and attitude towards life is an encouragement for every woman around the world. Her attempt to liberate herself from the established patriarchal web to establish her own identity can open the eyes of ignorant women who have never thought of fighting against the convention. In her effort to find her identity and establish herself against male custom, she also looks back to help confined women of her community. She understands that her individual effort to get freedom along with her personal self-establishment will not serve the purpose she is fighting for. As a conscious observer and a budding writer she realizes that she will get the ultimate autonomy only when she can spread the thirst for freedom among all women and make a collective move towards the desired destination. Esperanza's expectation of getting collective freedom is not only very relevant for Mexican American women but also for women in this part of the world where their attempts against established canons are considered unethical and rebellious. Only collective movement to establish ourselves against patriarchal practice will bring true freedom for women. Esperanza helps us to feel the thirst for liberty directs us to the path through which we can achieve success.

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