

**WOMEN AS MESTIZA AND HER MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS IN
GLORIA ANZALDUA'S BORDERLANDS**

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Abstract:

Gloria Anzaldua, an authoritative voice on feminist and homosexual issues, is relevant not only to Chicano culture but also to Third World countries. *BORDERLANDS/LAFRONTERA* is a groundbreaking work in cultural, feminist and queer theories. She attempts to define new mestiza by examining herself, her land and language. Anzaldua applied the term "new mestiza" to the individuals who are aware of conflicting and meshing identities to challenge binary thinking in the western world. This way of thinking is illustrated in postcolonial feminism. To her new mestizas are people who inhabit multiple worlds because of their gender, sexuality, color, class, personality, spiritual beliefs.

Keywords: Mestiza, Post Colonial Feminism, Gender, Mestiza Consciousness, Sexuality.

Mestiza is a concept introduced by Gloria Anzaldua through oft-quoted essay "Towards a New Consciousness". The essay, which appears in *Borderlands* is an integral part of *Women Studies*. Born as a Mestizo, she situates herself between Spanish/ Mexican and American culture. This in-between space aids her to deal with social and cultural marginalization and to theorize the experiences of all those who live in the margin or *Borderlands*. The work *Borderlands* traces the historical and personal journey of the people who inhabit the border between Mexico and the United States. It also reveals the socio-economic, political and spiritual impact of European conquest of indigenous people on the borderland as well as the ways in which the marginalized people oppress one another.

The borderlands denote borderlands between Mexico and US ie Texas. The important counterpart to these physical borderlands that she addresses throughout the book is "psychological borderlands, sexual borderlands, and spiritual borderlands. Anzaldua insisted that separatism invoked by Chicanos is not furthering the cause but instead of keeping the same racial division in place. She touches on the divisiveness of sexism and homophobia to Chicana culture. The concept of mestiza consciousness is rooted in borderlands and deals with the breaking down of cultural boundaries and synthesis of different culture, races, and languages. This amalgamation results in a new consciousness ie, mestiza consciousness which subverts the traditional perspectives on cultural identities and creates a multicultural paradigm.

The term "mestizaje" means a state of being beyond binary ("either-or"). She explored the experience of mestiza, a woman living on the border between different countries and cultures. Her concept of new mestiza goes beyond the biological level to incorporate other forms of identity as well. Anzaldua states about the influence of Jose Vasconcelos, a Mexican philosopher and his theory of inclusivity. According to him, the mixture of races do not result in an inferior being but a hybrid progeny; a rich gene pool. Vasconcelos envisaged mestiza as a cosmic race, a fifth race encompassing four major races of the world. His theory rejects the notion of racial purity practiced by the western world. The result is "alien consciousness" or "new mestiza consciousness" and Anzaldua confirms its inevitability:

Because of I, a mestiza,

Continually walk out of one culture

And into another,

Because I am in all cultures at the same time. (BL99)

A mestiza experiences emotional states of perplexity, multiple personality, and psychic restlessness. Most often such troubled situations create within her internal strife and insecurity. A mestiza becomes a product of the transfer of cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Mestiza constantly shifts out of habitual formations, indulges in divergent thinking characterized by movement away from setting patterns towards a whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.

The Mestizas support in changing the sexist elements in Mexican – Indian culture. As long as the woman is put down, Indian and Black are put down. Men are taught to be superior and real healing of psyche seems to be impossible in such a situation. The white culture attack beliefs of Mexican culture and both attack indigenous culture. Anzaldua realizes the necessity of challenging patriarchal conventions. This step leads to the path of liberation and it demands the erasure of dichotomy. Tenderness, a sign of vulnerability is imposed on women with verbal blows and abuses. Anzaldua argues that only gay men have the courage to expose themselves to a woman inside them and to challenge current masculinity. But these males who deviate from general norms become part of gross injustice. The struggle of mestiza is a feminist one.

The mestiza search for essential dignity:

I am cultureless because as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/ religious male-derived beliefs (BL102).

Mestiza Way

The mestiza struggles in unknown regions and perceives conflicting information. Even the struggle undergo psychological overwhelming of borders. Mestiza cannot tolerate rigid boundaries and for Anzaldua, borders stem from disagreeable ideas. As such flexibility is preferred for identity assertion. She says; "La Mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formation; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning to divergent thinking ...one that includes rather than excludes" (BL101). The new mestiza develops a tolerance for contradictions, ambiguity has plural personality and turns out this ambivalence; "She can be jarred out of ambivalence by intense, painful, emotional event...phenomena tend to collide...separate occurs" (BL101).

The new mestiza develops acceptance for inconsistencies and ambiguities. She learns to manipulate cultures and has multiple personalities, operates in a pluralistic mode and turns uncertainty into something else. The concept of synthesis is pivotal for mestiza consciousness and it originates from breaking down of unitary aspects of each paradigm as well as straddling of two or more cultures. The task of mestiza consciousness is to erase the subject-object duality and massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual.

The Mestiza is as indigenous as corn – the product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions. She resembles the ear of corn, a female seed-bearing organ. Mestiza moves away from the role of a sacrificial goat to an officiating priestess at crossroads; "As mestiza, I have no country...As a lesbian, I have no race...I am cultureless...a creature that questions definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings" (BL103). As the first step mestiza takes the inventory. She experiences weight on her back – baggage from the Indian mother, baggage from the Spanish father, the baggage

from the Anglo. Then as a second step, mestiza puts history through a sieve and looks at the forces as a race, as women. It involves a conscious rupture of oppressive traditions of cultures and religions. She communicates rupture and documents struggle. To accomplish this process, mestiza interprets history using new symbols. The third step is that of deconstruction and construction. As part of it, mestiza adopts new myths and new perspectives towards dark-skinned, women and queers. To reach the last step, "mestiza becomes one able to transform herself into a tree, a coyote, into another person" (BL 105). This stage affirms the transformation of small "I" into total self.

The mestizas support mutually in changing the sexist elements in Mexican Indian culture. The mestizo and the queer exist at this point of time on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose. They blend everything with the notion that "all blood is intricately woven together and that we are spawned out of similar souls" (BL 107). Anzaldua stated that there was a need for new masculinity and new man needs a movement. In her view, men more than women are bound to gender roles. She asserts that women must have the courage enough to liberate from the bondages. She supported the homosexual stance when she observes; "Being the supreme crossers of cultures...we come from all colors...our role is to link people with each other. Anzaldua blends mestizo and queer as one.

Anzaldua seeks woman's face, her true features, free from tainted biases of male dominance. In perceiving conflicting information, the woman is subjected to submerge in her psychological borders. Thereafter, she rejects rigid walls/ borders/ boundaries. The new mestiza copes by developing the tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to alter culture and operates in a pluralistic model. She achieves synthesis through mestiza consciousness. The dominance of the white culture shadows Chicanos with ignorance. They were robbed of self-determination, the power to resist, develop fully, distortion of history. This aggravated subjugation of Chicanos and their struggle resembles the struggle of the immigrants and blacks.

Anzaldua states about Chicano vision that reveals their true faces, dignity, and self; "... seek our woman's face, our true features, the positive and negative unseen clearly, free of the tainted biases of male dominance. I seek new images of identity, new beliefs about ourselves, our humanity... (BL109). The Chicanos can no longer conceal their needs, can no longer let fortifications and boundaries develop them. They never blame whites, males, and queer. They are without arms and ammunition and this is what Anzaldua calls it "mestiza way", Chicana way and the woman way (BL 110). This is essentially Anzaldua's search for essential dignity which reshapes her spiritual identity.

The future seems to hold mestiza because the future depends on breaking down of paradigms. The mestiza creates a new consciousness by creating a new mythos and changing the way

reality is perceived. The task of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner.

The mestizo evolves as supreme crossers of cultures having origins from all shades of color, class, race and time periods. As a racial entity, it is the concern of mestizo to address the white people that they need to be treated as humans with self-respect. The woman who crosses her culture, race, language, religion and even the borders become a true Mestiza and she survives in the world with the Mestiza consciousness:

We are the rolling pin.....

We are the pestle...

We will abide. (BL 104)

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