

Introduction

"To be an aboriginal person, to identify with an indigenous heritage in these late colonial times, requires a life of reflection, critique, persistence and struggle."

(McMaster and Martin II)

The image of the 'Indian' or Native people as it is referred today, has had varied interpretations in most of the 'mainstream' discourses. For writers like Daniel Francis, "The Indian began as a White Man's mistake, and became a White Man's fantasy" (*The Imaginary Indian* 5). In other words the Indians were looked from the prism of White perception. This resulted in the three visions of the India – the dissipated savage, the barbarous savage and the heroic savage. These three visions are symbolic in nature as represented by White authors in their stories about Native people. Many of the images of the Indian held by White were derogatory and many were not. The truth as to what is 'real Indian' kept recurring in White discovery in their vision of defining 'the other'.

With a strong colonising mission, the Whites began to perceive the Native people in terms of their own changing values and so the image of Native people changed over time. With the spread of the White settlement, conflict increased. From being military allies in the early nineteenth century, the Native people were gradually pushed to marginal position in the middle of nineteenth century.

From the mid of nineteenth century to the later part of twentieth century, as North Americans began to invent a new identity for themselves the image of the Other – the Indian became an integral part of their process of self-identification.

In Louis Owen's opinion, "the word Indian came into being on this continent simply as an utterance designed to impose a distinct "otherness upon indigenous people. To be Indian was to be not European" (*Other Destinies* 7). However the definition of the term Indian remains debatable due to its vague treatment even today in most of the texts. As a result, in the twentieth century, no other terminology has been so overtly debated as in the question of naming the Native people. In the entire North American belt, there is a constant shift in term from Indian to American Indian, Native Canadian, American, indigene, aboriginal people, etc. Although the most recent expression 'First Nations' personifies the renewal of Native identity, it is still not acceptable to the aboriginals of North America. In the absence of any consensus, the terms Native people and aboriginals are used in this thesis.

The onslaught of colonialism alongwith imperial expansion has a radically destabilising effect on the colonised subject and consequences a preoccupation with place and displacement that leads to a crisis in identity. Being one of the grim and barbaric realities of the third world countries, European colonisation was a strategic device for upholding western

dominance in most of part of the world. For the Native Indians the four hundred years of White colonial regime dispossessed them of their rich oral culture, history, land, heritage and above all, their distinctive cultural identity. The White man's disease, relocation programmes, reservation, conversion and other racist attitudinal patterns further contributed to the alienation of the Native Indian from his cultural ways and values of life.

The pre-contact history of the Native Indians is the history of a truly edenic culture. It was a life of harmony and peace. This Indian society organised mainly on farming and animal hunting. While change and diversity characterised Amerindian life in pre-contact period, the various aboriginals groups shared a number of features. In all Native societies, traditional values and nature regulated every day life. Although Indian society did not have a highly developed system of government, it nevertheless had a social order in compliance with the organic code of their tribal culture. This feature was similar in both the U.S.A. and Canada, during the pre-industrial age. Despite remaining in different politics the strong cultural similarity between English speaking Canada and the United States finds reflection in the treatment meted out to the Native Indians. American's 'melting pot' theory and Canada's policy of multi-culturalism have failed to acknowledge the rightful place / space of the Native people. With the European rule, the situation of the Native people fast changed and were systematically rendered as the marginalized people. Michael A. Dorris in his essay "The grass still grows the river still flows : Contemporary Native

American “analyses the hierarchical position of the Native Indians in the following manner:

The very humanity of indigenous people was questioned by some and it was universally and instantly assumed that there was a “natural hierarchy” of civilisation with Europeans at its apex. Notion such a cultural relativity seem to have been almost totally absent, and it was at first expected and eventually mandated that all Native people would unremittingly and unhesitatingly forsake their own language, mores and beliefs and embrace European substitutes. (44)

Seeing the inherent weakness of the Native people, the Whites further made the existence of the Native difficult and hard through treaties in exchange of land and promised them money health and education facilities. Furthermore, through their unscrupulous dealing the Whites sometimes altered traditional social and political structure of the Indian communities that proved detrimental to the Indian community as a whole. Being a source of cheap labour supply for the Whites, the Native people were forced into fur trading. The cultural subjugation was further exemplified by the priest whose role was as destructive as that played by the soldiers and the fur traders. In the words of Howard Adams, “Conversion to Christianity was a powerful force in the destruction of Native culture and religion and the imperialists fully understood how useful missionaries could be in subjugating colonised people” (*Prison of Grass* 31). Simultaneously the ‘White man’s disease’ – smallpox contributed to the extermination of Native

population. According to Washburn this disease was the strongest ally of the Europeans in the New World. This consequenced in the fall of Indian population from 18 million to 210,000 Indians, as mentioned in the 1910 census. This gave birth to a new concept – the ‘vanishing Indians’ that gained currency during the early eighteenth century.

Contrary to the ‘doomed culture theory’ prevalent in North America in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the aboriginal people of North America instead of disappearing and dying away in the post 1960’s emerged with vehemence and vitality than ever before. The frontier settlers in both North American nations spawned important reform movements. The 1960’s in this regard proved to be a turning point in the history of Native struggle for survival and cultural identity, for it was also the reform era in American politics. It was also the time of Civil Rights movement in America, an era of protest and activism.

In the last four decades, there has emerged a new voice in the North American literary landscape – the Native Indian voice. Despite being traditionally the other-ed voice in the White dominated North American discourse and discursive practices, it has come up with greater vehemence and vitality in the wake of resurgence in the post 1960’s. The present study endeavours to examine the construction of indigeneity as a means of representing the Native self with reference to selected Native fiction writers. The novels taken for analysis contextualise issues such as Native peoples displacement from land, White / Native conflictual relationship, colonial

mentality, White appropriation of Native culture, racism, and gender related issues from the post-colonial praxis. The subsequent chapters posit writers specific modes by locating Native writing from the parameters of Native Nationalism, orality, history, myths and legends, the dynamics of women's movement along with other revolutionary struggles that have necessitated a different view of looking at the 'Other'.

As we read Native writing we do find different parallels with respect to other marginal / post colonial discourses. For instance the discourse on black writing, feminism, and other indigenous forms of different settler colonies are similar to the issues and themes of Native writing. These themes rest on the principle of difference – as they are not in tandem with mainstream White discourses. Said traces in Western representations of African difference 'a systematic language for dealing with and studying Africa for the West', which figures Africa as a primitive vitality and includes the great colonialist texts on Africa – Conrad, Paton, Isak Dinesen. Toni Morrison also employs *Africanism* as "a term for the denotative and connotative blackness that African people have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, reading and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people." (45) Jan Mohammed's 'The Manichean Allegory' shows how the kind of literature that he names 'specular' fixes the Native "as a mirror that reflects the colonialist's self-image". Apart from its use in legitimating the discourses of slavery and colonialism, Africanism has largely been used by Europe to define itself in opposition to an African alterity. If the slave must be dehumanised to

elevate the European master, colonised must be primitivised for creating the civilising Saviour. Invariably, the African 'darkness' has been put into the service of Europe's narcissistic preoccupations. In the representation of the African as the Dark Other threatening the European, Chinua Achebe rightly detects a "desire – one might say the need in Western psychology to set Africa as a foil to Europe, a place of negation.

Re-defining from an indigenous point of view by incorporating oral tradition is a crucial aspect in contemporary Native writing that calls for a need to understand indigeneity in Native American Literature. Critics like Paula Gunn Allen and Agnes Grant believe that Native literature can be understood in terms of the culture from which it springs. This dates back to the nineteenth century Native American writers whose autobiographies inform their readers about Indian life and history. Texts like Apel's *A Son of the Forest* (1829), Bill Copway's *The Life, History and Travels of Kah-ge-gah-bowl* (1847) are combined with spiritual Native view and strong criticism of White treatment of Native people. In the post 1960's writing, autobiographical mode is visible in most of the texts ranging from Momaday's *Way to Rainy Mountain* to Silko's *Storyteller*. Most Native Writers today are not fluent speakers of the indigenous language of America, yet all of them have indicated their strong sense of indebtedness or allegiance to the oral tradition.

The discourse on indigeneity, as will be seen in Chapter One of this study, has not only remained a constant concern with Native writers but also with other aboriginal groups in settler colonies of Africa, Asia, New Zealand and

Australia. Over a period of time there has been a progressive increase in projecting indigenous voice / vision by most aboriginal writers. The 1960's in particular was the "renaissance" period of Native literature. The different indigenous modes like history, myths, trickster figures, autobiographical mode of writing, orality and storytelling were incorporated by Native writers. These different modes will be dealt with respect to selective writers like Louise Erdrich, Thomas King, Beatrice Culleton, Lee Meracle, Leslie Silko, Ruby Slipperjack, Scott Momaday, James Welch and Jeannette Armstrong. All these writers in question have necessitated a different view of looking at the Native people. This difference lies in their being an-other, problematising the need to reclaim themselves as true 'First Nations'.

Since theories on post colonialism make an attempt to understand the dispossessed and the peripheral groups, indigeneity too, is examined from the praxis of colonial / post colonial theoretical formulation. In this upsurge of marginality, the discourse on post colonialism foregrounds the need for recognizing identities and voices that were denied during the colonial days. Further it is a discourse which brings in the question of race, ethnicity, gender, class, eurocentricism as well as condition of marginality, migration and minoritization. Theorists like Said who talk about *Orientalism* or Bhabha's concept of ambivalence, mimicry and hybridity, or O'Manoni & Memmi's work on *Psychology of Colonialism* are important in understanding the predicament of marginal groups including the Native people.

The Native Movement of the post 1960's was an important step towards the re-definition of the Native people. It was an attempt to make the Natives realize their past and traditional histories as a means to contest their received status in White discourse and discursive practices. Like the other movements such as Black Power Movement or Feminist Movement, the American Indian Movement too was a movement for the upliftment of its Native people by engendering self pride and dignity in them. The Movement also questioned the received hierarchies and power structures of the dominant order. With an element of strong vehemence and protest involved, it called for a re-examination of the position of the Native in the dominant White order. Past and history were the two chief modes of regaining this lost identity. The resurgence of Native nationalism called for a Native world view of life untainted by White metaphors or cultural symbols.

This period of Native nationalism engendered group-consciousness, solidarity, re-claiming rights and treaties and necessitated an-other perspective among the Native people. Thomas King and Louise Erdrich, for instance as will be seen in Chapter two explore the cross cultural problems like Native rights and race relations while incorporating critical Native issues within the narrative structure. The narrative set in the present time recollects a wealth of stories and characters from Native history. In their depiction of the Native history, there is a constant flux and circular vision which is part of Native world view. By going back to their past / history the writers need to assert continuity / interrelatedness of Native world view also gets realised.

A sense of minimal history or an absence of an adequate past had constituted one of the major obstacles to the acquisition of a 'rooted' Native identity. History as seen in most of the White discourse represents the indigene as a spectacle. Very often this image is manipulated to suit the focus of White cultures. We still carry a host of assumptions and expectations informed by Hollywood western and television by the novels of James Fenimore Cooper and childhood cow-boy and Indian games. The ill-defined image of Natives as savage, red or dusty romantic brown have further caused belittlement of the Natives. To contest this notion, a serious consideration of Native history becomes very essential.

For the marginalized people the question of 'voice' and 'being' is important to counter the inappropriate image of themselves. This voice is not just a voice of dissent or protest but a voice of colonised Native who proposes to recover and reinvent the un-given truth of the Natives in White discourses. In other words, a revisionist view of history is given from the praxis of their mother culture. This revision or recovery of historical facts becomes a necessary political act to contest the received version of the Native people in the dominant discourse.

If Thomas King and Louise Erdrich give voice to their Native culture from the praxis of history and Native nationalism, Ruby Slipperjack and Leslie Silko, in their novels, as will be seen in chapter three give voice to their marginal/ized community through storytelling and oral narrative mode. The storytelling tradition is at the heart of most contemporary Native fiction,

which means that writer/story teller operates out of a shared knowledge base of myths and legends that are communal in nature. Because stories arise out of communal experience, the concept of a single author is an anomaly for Native critics and authors. Therefore contemporary Native American authors convert the collective traditional tales and myths of their people into European literary forms that demand an author; their names appears as the sole creator of a work, but it is instead their rendering of a tribal story rather than their own original story. Welch's reconfiguration of Gross Venture warrior's journey into manhood in *Winter in the Blood*, Silko's *Ceremony* as retold Yellow Woman and Spider-Woman stories, Momaday's *Way to Rainy Mountain* as his personal journey woven into the mythic journey of the Kiowa people and Erdrich's novels that tell the story of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa in the twentieth century are but a few examples of contemporary Native authors retelling tribal stories. In this chapter the novels of Silko and Slipperjack are examined as narrative that approximate storytelling mode in written format.

The orality of the Indian, the Maori, and the Aborigine seems an intrinsic part of their image, as it is of most representation of indigenous people. According to Terry Goldie, "Orality is a manifestation, demonstration of the other. Thus orality becomes the land, presence and mystically becomes the silent invocation of the consciousness of the other" (*Fear and Temptation* 108). By incorporating storytelling mode, trickster figures from myths & legends and a circular narrative, the transformation from oral to written gets realized in most Native literary productions.

Like storytelling, autobiography too is an important mode of narration for the Native people. In chapter four the writings of Culleton and Meracle are studied from the vantage point of autobiography with thrust on gender politics. These two writers problematise feminine search for their identity by contesting and critiquing the hegemonic patriarchal power structures, colonialism and institutional forms of racism.

The post 1960's period saw the emergence of strong female voice which questioned both the White world and the Native world. During the same period Black writing came to the forefront with its vehement and strong stand on history and continuing effects of specific processes of race-based discrimination within US society. Despite their very different history and background, Afro-American writing has relevance to the movements for the freedom of indigenous people such as Native Americans and other aboriginal groups. Parallels can also be drawn from Tony Morrison's unique black female aesthetic and Native women's representation in Native texts. As against a feminist mode in western theoretical field, it is more a feminine mode adopted by both Black women writers and Native women writers.

Native women, who are caregivers of the next generation, play an important role as mothers, leaders and writers. By re-inventing the English language, these writers are turning the 'process of colonization' around in order to read their literature as a process of decolonization. Their struggles are on two fronts : physical survival and cultural survival. Since oral tradition

continues to influence even today, they have adopted the autobiographical mode in bringing about rooted Native women's identity. This autobiographical mode helps in representing both the individual self as well as the collective self that stems from the communal nature of Native pre-colonial days.

Prior to the ground breaking novels in post 60's Native women writers had a tradition of writing life stories. Such works as Anna Moore Shaw's *A Pima Past*, Beverly Hungry Wolf's *The Ways of My Grandmother* and Campbell's *Half Breed* gives the reader an authentic look at women's roles within their own societies. Both Culleton and Meracle as will be seen in this chapter, present an alternative perspective of the history of Canada and in doing so they affirm and preserve Native views, Native realities and Native forms of telling while actively challenging and redefining dominant concept of history, truth and fact. Both upset stereo-types of Native people and particularly of Native women of mixed blood, while providing a context which speaks to some of the popularised, widely held images of Native people that have been created and maintained by the history and literature of the dominant 'White' culture in Canada. They question, blur and displace fixed delineations of genre, culture and race and assert their own space. They show how the social problems plague Native people in Canada and are caused by aggressive and oppressive social political and governmental systems which reflect embedded notions of imperialism, colonisation and assimilation.

Feminist discourse has itself been "a politics directed at changing existing power relations between men and women and in society as a whole. These are power relations which structure all areas of life : the family, education, household, political systems, leisure, culture, economics, sexuality and so on. In short, feminism questions and seeks to transform what it is to be a woman in society, to understand how the categories woman and the feminine are defined, structured and produced. In other words, feminist politics is a resistance to objectification of women in society, in literature, art and culture. It is also the articulation of a critical and an intellectual practice which challenges all patriarchal assumptions and norms. Like post colonial writer / theorists, post colonial women writers including Native women writers participate actively in the ongoing process of decolonising culture using the coloniser's language i.e. English along with oral traditions and their revision of western literary forms, women writers are creating an/other version of the women's place / space in society.

Different indigenous as well as post colonial modes have shaped Native writing. The modes employed by the Native writers were history, myth, oral narratology, autobiography respectively. In some ways these strategies of writing by Native writers calls for a move towards decolonisation. Chapter 5 locates selected novels of Scott Momaday, Jeannette Armstrong and James Welch as writings that aim at decolonising the Native from his sense of dispossession through Native traditional mode and values. Decolonisation like colonisation is a social process and has five distinct phases. These five phases from rediscovery, mourning, commitment and action are studied

vis-à-vis Native situation and Native writing. From contact period to the period of Native activism, decolonisation has operated on these five stages. The discourse on decolonisation is carried further with reference to African writing and postcolonial theorists like Frantz Fanon, Jan Mahammad, Edward Said and Ngugi.

Within post colonial theory decolonisation is one move towards neo-colonialism. Since Second World War wars of independence and struggles for decolonisation by former parts of European Empires have shown the indigenous people that attempts to break can involve enormous violence: physical, socio-economic, cultural and psychological. The struggle for freedom has been viewed by writers such as Frantz Fanon as a necessarily, inevitably violent process between 'two forces opposed to each other by their very nature. Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* argues that 'Decolonisation which sets out to change the order of the world is, obviously, a programme of complete disorder'. (27).

In order to rewrite themselves into existence and maintain Native solidarity the Natives in Canada & U.S.A. are using the enemy's language, English to erase the misconceptions held with respect to their people. As a kind of resistance the Native writers are creating a new Native World order untainted by White principle for their true sense of self determination and liberation. In a developing post-colonial society at the heart of decolonisation, the recovery of geographical territory is preceded by charting of cultural territory. It involves a two way process. The first being the period of 'primary resistance' that literally means fighting against

outside intrusion. The secondary period is the 'ideological resistance' where efforts are made to reconstitute a "shattered community, to save or restore the sense and fact of community against all the pressures of colonial system" (Davidson 252).

In the case of the Africans, decolonisation meant to reimagine an Africa stripped of its imperial past. The process of radical decolonisation proposed by Ngugi; one of the foremost African writer, involves rejecting English in place of his mother tongue for restoring an ethnic or national identity. To put it differently Ngugi rejected anything that carries the label of the colonizer. For him, this kind of rejection rests upon the assumption that an essential Gikuyu identity may be regained which the language of the colonizer seems to have displaced or dispersed.

In the same way for the Native Indians of North America decolonisation is the solution to systematic oppression perpetrated on them by the colonizers. It is also a means to contest the land claims issue in order to achieve self sufficiency. In his book *Tortured People : The Politics of Colonisation*, Howard Adams, a Native activist asserts that in most of the third world colonies of Africa and Asia decolonisation has meant violent confrontation. This violence in the term of political activism in 1960's and 1970's in North America was a platform to free Natives from their sense of inferiority, despair and inaction.

The selected novels in this chapter are taken as case studies to posit decolonisation at three levels: cultural, political, and social. Since

decolonisation is the wider project of reclaiming control over indigenous ways of knowing and being, these traditional modes and values are crucial for the Native people to represent their indigenous self. The Kiowa emergence myth, history of Blackfeet tribe and revisionist historiography rooted in American Indian movement of 1960's are some of the motifs employed by these writers to establish a decolonised Native nation. From critiquing the empire to establishing their own Native world order, Native writers have travelled a long journey from being colonised Natives to proud 'First Nation'.

The five chapters discussed so far make quite clear the Native writer's move towards decolonisation. While Ngugi's *Decolonizing the Mind* looks at the Africanness in African writing as a strategy of decolonization. The Native writers similarly insist on past, history, Native ritual and myths as strategies for decolonization. Since decolonisation is a wider project of reclaiming control over indigenous ways of knowing and being, these traditional modes and values are crucial for the Natives to represent their indigenous self.

The success of decolonisation is visible in the last three decades where authentic Native voices are beginning to challenge the appropriation of their culture by the non-Native culture's discursive formations. In place of Richardson, Lawrence, Rudy Wiebe, we now have a host of Native writers from Basil Johnston, Culleton, Campbell, SlipperJack, Eden Robinson. These voices have necessitated a different view of Natives in order to evolve a more authentic perception of the other-ed culture. Their writing be it

poetry, drama, fiction accounts their experiences and emotion from specificity of their other-ed culture. It is this cultural specificity that makes it different. And it is this difference that demands a re-vision of the misconstrued notion of the Native in the White discourse. This difference also calls for ignoring, hegemonic power structure of White / mainstream writers / discourses.

The political dimension has been an inherent feature of this kind of writing and "has always been quintessentially political addressing their persecution and betrayal and summoning their sources for resistance", (Petrone 182). Native writers in particular express what they experiences everyday. As a result the theme of cultural clash and dilemma of Native Indian's identity are the main object of inquiry. This overt kind of representation had labelled Native writing as protest literature. While making critique of White colonial power politics, Native writers also incorporate traditional values to heal their scars and become liberated. Liberation for them rests on their old Native Indian rituals and traditions that have for generations enabled their ancestors to survive in extreme hostile conditions. Writing too for the Native people, becomes a means of speaking about themselves from the perspective of the other-ed culture. This is visible in recent writings that provide insight into the experiences of reading, writing, and living as an aboriginal person in the twenty first century. The movement is part of the ongoing process of decolonisation that these other-ed voices are trying to cope with in order to represent their true self.

In their move towards decolonisation, Native writers have addressed four urgent and necessary issues – mapping colonialism, diagnosing colonialism, healing colonised indigenous people, and imagining postcolonial visions of Native worl/d order. This vision is part of the movement for protecting, healing and restoring long-oppressed people and respecting their cultures and languages. Therefore Native writing is no longer a construct of ‘oppression’ but of ‘survival’. Each of the nine writers, whose writing is discussed in this study tries to contextualize the Native self vis-a-vis the indigenous mode in his / her writer - specific way. The writers in question have evolved an indigenous mode of narration, echoing their own voice – the voice of the ‘other’. What emerges today is a voice that can neither be denied its legitimacy nor its presence in the dominant discourse. The politics of representation has relegated Native literature as the ‘other-ed’ literature. But it still continues to prosper as can be seen in the ever increasing number of writers, books, journals, publishing companies, and the varied departments of the university. “Lo, the poor Indian” – a phrase taken from Alexander Pope’s *An Essay on Man* (1734) is no more tenable. An important development in this field is the fact that now “aboriginal writers are gaining a leadership among their own people, and perhaps this is one of the most significant developments of all in recent years” (Ruffo 14). The attempt to locate these discourses from the parameter of indigeneity and post colonial theoretical constructs is a small step towards rethinking Native writing in its proper place / space.

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