

Chapter 1

Indigeneity, Post Colonialism and Native North American Literature.

"..... We, as indigenous people, must start within. We must exercise internal sovereignty which is nothing more than taking control of our lives, our families, our clans, and our communities. To do that, we must return to our traditions, because they speak to write relationships, respect, solidarity and survival. I cannot beg for political power because I will not get it. However, I can pray for personal power and work with people around me to achieve internal sovereignty. That is our post-colonial existence, although at this point it is a unilateral declaration of post-colonial status. Given the structure of our colonies within and our relationship with the colonizers, all we can do is to declare community and spiritual independence. No tank, no smart bomb and no colonial cop can penetrate that. (Robert Yazzie 47)

The word indigeneity, according to Oxford Dictionary comes from the adjective "indigenous", meaning originating or occurring naturally in a particular place, in other words being "natural". In Australia and North America, the word indigenous is a way of including the many diverse communities, language groups and nations, each with their own identification within a single grouping. In other contexts, such as New Zealand, the terms 'Maori' or tangata whenua are used much more frequently than 'indigenous' as the universal term, while different origin and tribal terms are also used to differentiate between groups. Although the word 'Maori' is an indigenous term it has been identified as a label

which defines a colonial relationship between 'Maori' and 'Pakeha', the non-indigenous settler population. For many of the world's indigenous communities there are prior terms by which they have named themselves. There are also terms by which indigenous communities have come to be known, initially perhaps as a term of insult applied by colonizers, but then politicised as a powerful signifier of oppositional identity, for example the use of the term 'Black Australia' by Aborigine activists. Inside these categories for describing or labelling are other terms that describe different layers of relationships and meanings within and between different groups. Some of these terms are about the classification systems used within the local colonial context, and others are about a prior relationship with groups whose territories now span different states.

'Indigenous peoples' is a relatively recent term which emerged in the 1970s out of the struggles primarily of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood. It is a term that internationalises the experiences, the issues and the struggles of some of the world's colonized peoples. The final 's' in indigenous peoples' has been argued for quite vigorously by indigenous activists because of the right of peoples to self-determination. It is also used as a way of recognizing that there are real differences between different indigenous peoples. The term has enabled the collective voices of colonized people to be expressed strategically in the international arena. It has also been an umbrella enabling communities and peoples to come together, transcending their own colonized contexts and experiences, in order to learn, share, plan, organize and struggle collectively for self-determination on the

global and local stages. Thus the world's indigenous populations belong to a network of peoples. They share experiences as peoples who have been subjected to the colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives, even after it has formally pulled out. As Wilmer has put it, 'indigenous peoples represent the unfinished business of decolonization' (25). In this chapter it is proposed to relate indigeneity within the larger parameter of colonial and post-colonial theory. As it would be seen later the different fictional strategies employed by the writers are not just writer specific modes but are also indigenous as well as post-colonial strategies for contesting and reclaiming their identities in the dominant discourse.

Within postcolonial theory, the concept of indigeneity alongwith ethnicity has raised many vexed and complicated issues among theorists. The notion of race, marginality, imperialism and identity constantly intersect with both these terms. According to Stuart Hall, "the conceptualisation of ethnicity itself is undergoing a radical change based upon the increasingly complex politics of representation: old binarisms of Black/White, and indeed conceptions of the "essential" ethnic subject itself are now increasingly open to question" (Post Colonial Reader 214). Yet it is a widespread practice to define ethnicity as otherness. The concept of other becomes important in understanding literature produced by Natives/indigenous people of Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Africa. For instance in Black cultural politics, the concept of "Black experience" was crucial for representing themselves against objectification, negative

figuration and stereotypical portrayal by the counter-position of a positive Black imagery.

Postcolonial studies has been preoccupied with the issues of hybridity, creolisation, mestizaje, in-betweenness, diaspora and liminality with the mobility and crossover of ideas and identities generated by colonialism. In postcolonial theory, hybridity is meant to evoke all those ways in which English vocabulary was challenged and undermined. Hybridity or mestizaje is more self-consciously invoked as anti-colonial strategy by some Caribbean and Latin American Activist, most notably the Cuban writer Roberto Fernandez Retamar. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* discusses another related but distinct dimension of colonial hybridities i.e. the intellectual and political cross fertilization that resulted from Black diaspora. It is Homi Bhabha's usage of the concept of hybridity that has been the most influential and controversial within recent postcolonial studies. Bhabha goes back to Frantz Fanon to suggest that liminality and hybridity are necessary attributes of the colonial condition. Drawing from Frantz Fanon he further attributes the articulation of colonial desire in relation to the place of the other. The ambivalence of the colonial presence causes a split in the colonial discourse and is the site for resistance.

Ever since Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1952), it has been a common place to use "other" and "not self" for the White view of Blacks and for resulting Black view of themselves. This implies that the White self is the subject and Black other is the object in any discourse. The terms are similarly applied to the Native Americans, the Maories and the Aborigine. They are the other and not

self but also must become self. It is through indigeneity that the aboriginals attempt to represent themselves. Therefore, the construction of indigeneity is crucial for the aboriginals in order to heal the wounds left by the colonizers. Drawing on the narrative and lyrical tradition of their past, aboriginal writing reveals a distinct Native aesthetic, primarily meant to undo the belittlement and stereotyping of Native culture by the Europeans.

Postcolonial studies and post colonial analysis have over the last three decades developed concepts that have been rendered questionable and are in the process of refinement. With the term "post colonial" subjected to continuous debate within and across disciplines, it still continues to arrest the attention of researches in looking at cultural differences and marginality across the world. In the wake of postcolonial theory and practice, the representation of the marginalized has come into prominence in the literary and critical discourses. In this upsurge of marginality the discourse on post colonialism foregrounds the need to recognize identities and voices that were other-ed and ignored earlier during the colonial days. As a result, various minority groups such as Blacks, First Nations, Maories etc have acquired visibility and recognition in the literary and critical discourses. Postcolonial writing questions the unequal treatment of indigenous people in settler/invader society and indicates a continuous process of resistance and reconstruction. The other-ed literature in ex-colonies like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Africa and others have tried to resist the prevailing Eurocentric approach by reconstructing a distinct indigenous mode of representation. This distinct mode of representation calls for looking into the issue of translation, re-interpretation, appropriation,

romantisization, museumization, consumerisation and marginalisation of Natives both in literature and in culture at large.

Post colonialism is seen with contempt among Australian aboriginal writers of late who question the ongoing colonialism of aborigine, as it is not merely a fiction, but a linguistic manoeuvre on the part of some White theorists. Or a White concept that has come to the fore in literary theory in the last few years as western nations attempt to define and represent themselves in non-imperialist terms. In terms of defining aboriginal writing as postcolonial literature it appears that there are two distinct views. The first is that of literary establishment who use the term as a way of describing a genre in which aboriginal people write and the second is that of most aboriginal writers who see the term as a matter of the past.

Drawing from varied theoretical positions and associated strategies, post colonial discourse has become a rich body of discourse right from Fanon, O'Manoni, Memmi to Said, Bhabha, Jan Mohammad, Aijaz Ahmed and so on. They all have looked at colonialism and post colonialism from their position of respective societies and ideology that they profess/belong to. Post-colonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to demise of empire as one traces back to Ashcroft's definition in the *The Empire Writes Back*, but has over the year evolved as an ideological concept for the students of literature in particular to read texts other than their own cultures in order to contest the limitations of Eurocentric norms.

Some scholars in this field are astounded by the claims made by the writers of *Empire Writes Back* and other post colonial critics, that literature and people of so many diverse areas around the world share "a common condition (23). The analysis of six different texts from different areas of globe are shown to reflect" shared themes and recurrent structural and formal patterns as follows:

The symptomatic readings of texts which follow serve to illustrate three important features of all post colonial writing. The silencing and marginalizing of the post-colonial voice by the imperial center within the text, and the active appropriation of the language and culture of that center. These features and the transitions between them are expressed in various ways in the different texts, sometimes through formal subversions and sometimes through contestations at the thematic level. In all cases, however the notions of power inherent in the model of center and margin are appropriated and so dismantled. (83).

According to Arun P. Mukherjee, such theorization based on a narrow band of literary texts need not necessarily represent the people of the land. For him "This slippage in the discourse of post colonial theory where the critics indiscriminately mode from the text go write to the people represented by the writer in the text thereby ignoring to consider the question of the writer's gender, race, class and caste position." (25) For Makarand Paranjape, the discourse of post colonialism is itself controlled, directed, even created by the very imperial culture which it seeks to resist and replace. In his article "Coping with Post colonialism", Paranjpe has tried to expose the hollowness and futility

of a simplistic revolt or rejection of the West. Like most of the things of Western origin, post colonialism can neither be rejected nor accepted fully. A mixed baggage, it has made an advance over "Common Wealth Studies" in foregrounding of the central and controlling aspect of colonialism. Despite these voices of dissent among theorists and literary critics, post colonialism as an ideological construct does help in understanding the literature produced by indigenous population in Canada, U.S.A., Australia and New Zealand in understanding the predicament of marginal groups.

Orientalism by Said published in 1978 is a seminal work that documents the distinction between the "Orient" and the "Occident". Broadly speaking Orientalism is a western style of dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient. Having resemblance to Foucault's concept of discourse, the relationship between the Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony. Consequently, Orientalist discourse for Said is more valuable as a sign of power executed by the West over the Orient than a "true" discourse about the orient. For Said, orientalism is not a Western plot to hold down the "Oriental" world but:

It is a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction but also of a whole series of "interests" which it not only creates but maintains. It is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in

some cases to central, manipulate even incorporate, what is manifestly different world. (12)

The discourse of Orientalism persists into the present, particularly in the West's relationship with "Islam" as evident in this study. As a discursive mode, Orientalism models a wide range of institutional constructions of the colonial other, one example being the study and representation of Africa in the West since nineteenth century.

Fanon's work in Algeria led him to become actively involved in the Algerian liberation movement and to publish a number of foundational works on racism and colonialism. These include *Black Skin White Masks*, a study of the psychology of racism and colonial domination. *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) is a broader study of how anti-colonial sentiment might address the task of decolonization. In these texts Fanon brought together the insights he derived from his clinical study of the effects of colonial domination on the psyche of the colonized and his Marxist derived analysis of social and economic control. From this conjunction he developed his idea of *Comprador* class or elite ; who exchanged roles with the White colonial dominating class without engaging in any radical restructuring of society. The Black skin of these compradors was "masked" by their complicity with the values of the White colonial power. Fanon argued that the Native intelligentsia must radically restructure the society on the firm foundation of the people and their values.

One of the most widely employed and most disputed terms in postcolonial theory, hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the central zone produced by colonization. The term "hybridity" has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha, whose analysis of colonizer/colonized relations stresses their inter-dependence and mutual construction of their subjectivities.

Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical 'purity' of cultures untenable. For him, the recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us to overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate:

It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity.

(Bhabha 1994: 38)

During the precontact period North American tribes made pictographic accounts of rituals and important events. Their sacred literature was preserved in books of the Maya of Mesoamerica. However Native American Literature was

transmitted orally. It is with the conquest of Indian lands and subsequent education of Native children in White-run schools that marks the beginning of Native American authors.

Most nineteenth century Indian authors wrote non-fiction prose. They published protest literature, autobiographies and ethnohistories in respect to the curtailment of Native American rights and attempts to remove the Indian from their traditional homelands. Nineteenth century Native American writers also wrote autobiographies to inform their readers about Indian life and history. These autobiographies often included forceful commentaries on what White had done to Indian people. The first full length autobiography dates back to Apel's *A Son of the Forest* (1829), which combines the literary tradition of the spiritual confession with sharp criticism of White treatment of Indian. This was published at the height of the debate over the Indian Removal; Bill. Copway's *The Life, History and Travels of Kah-ge-gah-bowl* (1847) was undoubtedly written in response to attempts to move the Minnesota Ojibwa from territory ceded to them in 1842. It blends the Western European traditions of the confession and the missionary reminiscence with Ojibwa myth, tribal ethnohistory and personal experience, a combination that characterizes later Indian autobiographies.

When Indians were put on reservations, the traditional tribal life changed and many Indian authors published accounts of their tribes, myths, history and customs. Some of them were *Sketches of Ancient History of Six Nations* (1827) by David Cusick. Cobway's *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches*

of the *Ojibwa Nation* (1850). Among others who authored ethno-histories of their tribes were Peter Dooyenate Clark *Origin and Traditional History of the Wyandotts*, (1870) Chief Elias Johnson *Legends, Traditional and Laws of the Iroquois* (1881). Journal and Travel Literature also featured in the early 19th century that talked about encroachment by White culture and European education. Fiction began to supplant non-fiction as the genre to which Native authors increasingly turned. Many Native American novels dealt with mixed blood quests to find their places in the Indian and White worlds and with the survival of tribalism. Mourning Dove, Matthews and D'Aray McNickle incorporate these themes in their novels. In *Cogawa, the Half Blood* (1927), Mourning Dove combines the portrayal of a strong-willed heroine who temporarily rejects her tribal heritage with plot elements from westerners. Matthews *Sun dawn* (1934) focuses on the problems faced by the Osage after allotment and during the oil boom of the 1920's. The protagonist is a mixed blood Osage whose abandonment of his ancestral past and inability to adjust to the White-dominated present ends in alcoholism. The most talked-about novel during this period is McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936). The novel powerfully depicts the dilemma of a mixed-blood inadvertently caught up in the unpremeditated murders that his mother and girl friend commit. His strongly traditional mother and a tribal elder lead the protagonist back to the Flathead culture he had rejected.

Autobiography was also a popular literary form. It was a new form, "alien to an oral heritage where the communal and collective were celebrated" (Petronie 70). These autobiographical works retained many of the oral features of the Indian

pre-literate cultures. This form enabled Native writers to incorporate their personal experiences with communal legend, myth and history. Arnold Krupat has distinguished between what he calls autobiographies by Indians and Indian autobiographies. Autobiographies by Indians are self-written texts produced by Native people who had accepted Western civilization at least to the extent of learning how to write. Whereas Indian autobiographies are compositely produced texts, the result of a collaboration between a Euro-American editor who fixes the text in writing and a traditional Indian person who is the subject of the text. Typically one or more mixed blood persons have been involved as translators, as well.

One of the pioneers in contemporary Native writing, Momaday, chose to write autobiography in ways that recalled oral Indian storytelling. In general, Momaday begins the names, "my narrative is an autobiographical account specifically, it is an act of the imagination. When Pohd Lohk told a story he began by being quiet. The he said, them Keah de, "They were camping" and he said it every time. I have tried to write in the same way, in the same spirit, imagine. They were camping" (n.p.) In *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and *The Names* Momaday is trying to give a sense in writing of what it would be like to experience stories in an oral culture. And so he eschews long narrative passages, brief stories, descriptive passages and images that tumble out are after another with very few explicit connections or transitions. Momaday has influenced the writers. Silko's *Story teller* (1981) follows Momaday very closely. Her writing in particular is designed to convey a sense of oral performance. But most strikingly, her autobiography, like Momaday's is discontinuous.

According to Kenneth Lincoln, it is one story image poem, after another, "with very little explicit as to how the one relates to another.

The resurgence of Indian cultural and religious values has made Native writers realize the importance of their traditional oral literature. Hence similar themes and artistic modes are employed from pre-contact literature making a historical continuity from oral to written tradition. Native writers have therefore

. . . . learned to draw on their ancient tradition a biospheric world where humans, plants, animals, rocks and wind participate in a dynamic cosmic relationship; the significance of ancient ceremonies and rituals; the special role of grand mother as a source of instruction and healing voice of vision and prophecy, importance of community life, kinship, importance of the role of elders as custodians of cultural and spiritual values.

(Petrone 183)

Redefining 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. As rightly said by Paula Gunn Allen that the significance of the literature can best be understood in terms of the culture from which it springs. While Agnes Grant defines Native American Literature as, "Native people telling their own stories in their own ways unfettered by criteria from another time and place." (Grant 124).

Colonisation as an ideology had profound consequences on human psychology, particularly for the relationship between people of 'European descent and indigenous people. Each colonial power perfected its own style and system of exploitation, domination and oppression. These strategies have left a traumatic legacy in the world. As Frantz Fanon stated in *The Wretched of the Earth*, "The colonized will first manifest his aggressiveness which had been deposited in his bones against his own people but will eventually turn on everything" (40). Therefore assigning negative values to aboriginal differences has been a persistent strategy in slavery and colonization. This is a strategy granted in ideology rather than in empirical knowledge. Thus, Eurocentric authorities develop the negative stereo-type of indigenous people into a comprehensive prejudice, a stigmatised identity and negative attitude. Racist discursive strategy says Memmi, "always had an interpretation ofdifferences a prejudiced attempt to place a value on them." (188).

The discovery of America produced two negative and seemingly contradictory views of indigenous people. The first vision was that indigenous people were wild, promiscuous, propertyless and lawless. The second vision was of the noble savage who lived with natural law but without government, husbandry and much else.

Together these visions created the narrative tradition of aboriginal deficiency and unassimilability. Further racism underlying the differences based on races resolved any inconvenient contradictions. The strategy of racism allows the

colonialists to assert Eurocentric privileges while exploiting indigenous people in a inhuman way. As Albert Memmi explains, "racism is the generalised and final assigning of values to real or imaginary differences, to the accuser's benefit and at his victim's expense, in order to justify the former's own privileges or aggression, (Dominated Man: Notes Toward a Portrait 185).

Consequently colonialism fostered marginalization, deprivation and dispossession of the Native in both Canada and the U.S.A. The following lines typify this:

In school I find myself alienated from the town children if I played with my friends from White Bear at recess. The aboriginal children could not choose to play with the town children. The choice is not theirs to make. The aboriginal children were deemed a subculture, and the students entrapped them in to a state of alienation. This resulted in their negative judgments of their value and self worth. They were not invited to play because they were viewed as inferior. The roles of dominator and dominated were formed at a young age (Levoy Little Bear, Jagged World Views Colliding 103).

Such racist attitude was furthered through oppressive residential schools and Churches that created a false belief the Native culture, language and religion were degrading and insignificant. As aptly said by Vickie English Curie, "The government residential schools, western religion and poverty have systematically robbed Indian people of an identity, self-esteem and self worth.

The formal education offered could have complemented the informal education of the child's culture; instead it degraded the child's cultural life and prohibited the development of our own parallel formal education." (59).

The following lines by Daes are worth noting to understand the politics of colonization :

All forms of oppression involve a denial of the individual spirit and its quest for self-expression. Colonialism, slavery, intolerance, discrimination, and war – all these cruel experiences share a common element. They do not exist except insofar as their lives – or their deaths – advance the desires of others. The victims provide the pigment, but somebody else holds the brush. The individual consciousness of the enslaved and the oppressed is superfluous. Oppressed people are made to realize that they could serve their purpose equally well if they were mindless robots. (5)

It is inferiorization that characterizes the politics and cultural domination of the colonized. Colonialism dehumanises and makes the aboriginal a dependent object open to whims of the colonizer. Through exploitation, racism and notional oppression the Native is literally made an object. Under colonialism society is transformed. Indigenous forms of cultural and economic production are substituted for the needs of the colonizer. This has been clear with the Natives since the period of fur trade. The presence of colonial labour force free

the working class of the dominant group from the most degrading and menial tasks.

Alongwith colonialism, eurocentrism also contributed to the dehumanisation of the Natives. Eurocentrism is a view that Europeans have of themselves as being culturally and politically superior to all other people in the world. Consequently Indians of North America were seen to be the opposite of Europeans. According to Howard Adams, "Eurocentrism as an ideology is the major contributor to the devastation and suppression of aboriginal civilization. It has progressed unchecked and has flourished through the imperial control of the media and popular opinion. As a result, the culture of the Western world is best known from the eurocentric perspective" (*Tortured People* 21)

Armed with gun powder and military technology the Europeans plundered largely from Asia and the Mediterranean, seizing aboriginal land. Britain and France conquered and oppressed aboriginal people with military force as a matter of policy. When Natives served no economic purpose European slaughtered whole population. Such was the fate of the Beothuk Indians in New foundland. Imperialism alongwith its weapons – Christianity, political subversion, violence and germ warfare was the vicious destroyer of everything aboriginal.

Indigenous scholars of newly independent Third World countries, as in Africa, were the first to challenge Eurocentricism. Gradually the aboriginal people of Africa took control of their past. The imperial histories were gross distortions of

aboriginal heritage and culture. This process is also visible in North America, where authentic historical sources are now being critically scrutinized. The Jesuit relations diaries which were portrayed for centuries as unquestionable, are today regarded as little more than myth. A unique ecclesiastical class, these Jesuit priests had enormous vested interest in successful colonisation. They were apparently granted one million acres of land and substantial sums by King Louis XIV of France for their diaries.

Eurocentric interpretations create a false consciousness among the colonialists and the colonized. It does not allow for alternate forms and theories. In a quasi-apartheid state, new interpretation of indigenous history is imperative. It demands a critical analysis that emphasizes aboriginal consciousness, life experiences and resistance struggle – the road to indigeneity.

Colonialism along with imperial aggression consequenced destruction of the colonized at all possible levels, leading to a crisis in identity. Most post-colonial writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngũgĩ, Rushdie etc. portray a sense of alienation and identity crisis in their works. The Natives dilemma of identity continues, ever since their discovery by Columbus in 1492 that led to their dispossession both socially and economically. The subtle cultural interaction between the Europeans and the Natives, which otherwise were distinct from each other, constituted to the divide between the colonizer and the colonized on the basis of relationship of power. In his recent book *A Tortured people: The Politics of Colonization* Howard Adams from a Canadian perspective argues four major components of colonization. The first one according to him is the invasion

of indigenous territory by military. In their imperial mission, the Europeans invaded and plundered all indigenous lands and claimed them as sovereign territory. At the time of conquest, most Indians were either slaughtered or made slaves. They overran cities and villages and in a massive killing spree spared no one irrespective of age or sex.

The second component is the destruction of the political organization, culture and economy of the aboriginal people and its eventual replacement with a racist colonisation process that transformed the culture, values, and customs of the Native society. In this manner political culture of imperialism destroyed indigenous institutions and processes of democratic collective governance that were in harmony with nature, animals and environment. The third element is an extension of the second whereby legal and administrative systems are means of subjugating the aboriginal people. The imperial law coupled with bureaucratic logic professed the 'divide and rule' policy of the government. Organisations like Indian Affairs Department were extended means of oppressing Native interests. Classification as status Indian/non-status Indians were means of deepening the chasms among Natives as well in Native/non-Native relationship.

Lastly the fourth component is racism that considers the indigenous population as inferior due to biological characteristics. In school, Native Indians were labelled as retarded and dumb in comparison to White students. Words like low class, crude and dirty were used to depict them as shy, submissive and socially crippled. In Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, the same

dialectical opposition is seen in terms of the psychology of colonialism that imparts a sense on superiority to the colonizer (White) and correspondingly a sense of inferiority in the colonized (Native). "Colonialism, Frantz Fanon says", is not satisfied by merely withholding a people in chains and employing Native's head of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (Godard "politics" 199). This went hand in hand with the imperial mission of economic exploitation and both cultural and biological genocide. It further got strengthened by the Eurocentric view of Indian to justify conquest and oppression. As Howard Adams says, "Emasculate the aboriginal, that is the function of Eurocentricism. In other words White supremacy beget intellectually crippled Natives who bare inferiorization and subservice" (52).

Since European contact, Natives in Canada and USA have been engaged in a struggle to survive as distinct social and cultural communities with political and economic rights within North America society. Unlike other minority groups in the United States, Native America has a special legal relationship with the federal government by virtue of more than 400 treaties and agreements between United States governments and hundreds of Native societies. As a result of this treaty relationship, Native Americans struggle for survival and equality have taken place in two legal forums, one of which – the domain of federal Indian law – is unique to Native Americans and the other of which – local, state and federal law – is shared by all other Americans.

As the debate over the issue of 'appropriation of Native voice' in literature continues to be refined, argued and explored, it brings to the fore, questions about definitions of 'Nativity' or 'aboriginality' as well as the sources, validations and problematics associated with these definitions. The question of who has the right to speak of, about, for indigenous peoples quickly leads to the question of who or what is "indigenous" and in what ways is "indigenous" literature distinct from other world literatures. In his "Introduction" to *All My Relations : An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction*, Thomas King notes that "when we talk about contemporary Native literature, we talk as though we already have a definition for this body of literature when, in fact, we do not. And when we talk about Native writers, we talk as though we have a process for determining who is a Native writer and who is not, when, in fact, we don't" (King x.)

Definitions of who we are affect not only First Nations peoples in North America but indigenous peoples around the world who have been subjected to "the White Man's burden" of authority and control through the domination and assimilationist tactics of colonising governments. "Who are the Natives" has been constructed and defined by Others to the extent that at times it negates the validity of the Native in each. As a result, confusion, uncertainty, low self-esteem and / or need to assert control over identity are just some of the damaging effects of colonisation.

In Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, successive colonising governments have used language and the power of words backed by military

fire-power to subjugate and control the indigenous peoples of the land. Language has been used not only to control what Natives do but how Natives are defined. For example, the names by which First Nations people are known in Canada are often not the names by which the people refer to themselves but the names by which other First Nations referred to them. Thus, the Anishabek are known as Ojibway and for years the Inuit were known as Eskimo. To further complicate matters, the colonising governments constructed and imposed labels and definitions of "Indian" identity in an effort to limit and control treaty and aboriginal rights and to promote assimilation and the elimination of the "Indian problem". As a result, in Canada the Indian Act regulates who is and is not entitled to government recognition of "Indian status". This has led to a rather complicated and confusing number of definitions of Native identity, all of which have political, geographical, social, emotional, and legal implications. There are status Indians, non-status Indians, Metis, Inuit, Dene, Treaty Indians, urban Indians, on reserve Indians, off-reserve Indians; there are Indians who are Band members and Indians who are not Band members. There are First Nations peoples, descendants of First Nations, Natives, indigenous peoples, aboriginal peoples, mixed-bloods, mixed-breeds, half-breeds, enfranchised Indians, Bill C-31 Indians. There are even women without any First Nations ancestry who gained "Indian status" by marriage. And these are just some of the labels we must consider in identifying the Natives. There are also definitions based on Tribal / First Nations affiliations, on language, on blood quantum...But what does this have to do with a discussion of literature? Well, it forces us to re-think some of the assumptions based on readings and criticism of indigenous writing and orality. It further forces us to re-examine the Natives positions vis a vis the

text or story and the writer or speaker as well as to consider the context in which both the story composition and telling are done. King says that;

In our discussions of Native literature, we try to imagine that there is a racial denominator which full-bloods raised in cities, half-bloods raised on farms, quarter-bloods raised on reservations, Indian adopted and raised by White families, Indians who speak only English, traditionally educated Indians, university-trained Indians, Indians with little education, and the like all share. We know, of course, that there is not. We know that this is a romantic, mystical, and, in many instances, a self-serving notion that the sheer number of cultural groups in North America, the variety of Native languages, and the varied conditions of the various tribes should immediately belie. (King xi).

As King suggests, one of the difficulties in applying a rubric which encompasses such a wide diversity of writers, experiences and histories as well as the art and literature which arises from them, is that any one, solitary label distorts the multiplicity by suggesting that there is a cohesive, unitary basis of commonality among those so labelled. This is an obvious danger of any generalisation but in this case the danger is exacerbated because the definition of these commonalities is left to the readers' imaginations, which, because of the ways in which indigenous peoples have been characterised and defined as "bloodthirsty", "savages", "cannibals", or "noble", simple "children of nature" throughout contact and into the present day, have been informed by stereotypes and misrepresentations. Stereotypes such as the Drunken / Lazy

/ Promiscuous Indian, or the Noble Savage, or the nineteenth Century Plains Indian as prototype, continue to pervade the consciousness of those, both Native and non-Native, who have been “educated” through Western institutions. Historically, these institutions have acted as tools of the State, often in concert with the Church, to civilise and control indigenous peoples while nurturing and preserving the righteousness of imperialist attitudes. Consequently, stereotypes, maintained through the education system, are the points of reference for many readers who make numerous faulty and at times damaging assumptions about “Native” writers and the types of literature we produce or ought to produce.

Too often, the image of the indigenous writer which comes to mind will be one of a “storyteller”, “traditional” in appearance and dress, dark skinned, raven haired, who uses “legends” or “myths” to teach the audience about his or her culture. This highly romanticised image discounts those who do not fit easily within it. Many indigenous writers have had the unpleasant experience of not meeting someone’s stereotype. Metis writer and professor Emma LaRocque tells of her experience with a CBC radio journalist in an hour long interview during which she regaled him with “cultural sorts of information” suddenly realises that she is a professor and ends the interview asking, “Could you tell me where I could find a real Metis storyteller? (LaRocque in *Writing the Circle* xxiii). She is not alone. Janice Gould, in her essay “The Problem of Being ‘Indian’ : One Mixed-Blood’s Dilemma” tells of mixed-blood Mohawk writer Beth Brant’s experience with this sort of cultural ignorance :

After her reading a White woman came up to her and said, "I don't see why you go on about being a half-breed. You look White enough!" This was another way of saying Brant did not look Indian enough. Her Indianness was erased (Gould in *De/Colonising the Subject* 84).

Indianness can be erased when the reality of indigenous life confronts the fiction of indigenous stereotypes. As Carol Lee Sanchez notes in her essay "Sex, Class and Race Intersections : Visions of Women of Colour" in *A Gathering of Spirit : A Collection by North American Indian Women*;

To be Indian is to be considered "colourful", spiritual, connected to the earth, simplistic, and disappointing if not dressed in buckskin and feathers; shocking if a city-dweller and even more shocking if an educator or other type of professional (Sanchez in Green 163).

Unfortunately, the erasure of another's identity can be a very damaging and oppressive action based on ignorance, racism and racial power relations which create an environment in which non-Natives feel justified in questioning another's identity. In reality, most Native writers do not fit easily into the construction of the "White Man's Indian" although most of them share some of the attributes. While it is true that First Nations people across Canada, and around the world, share certain values which arise out of our connections to the land and out of our common histories and experiences with colonising governments, in some ways pan-Indianism and other such simplistic generalisations become self-fulfilling prophecy: some of this share is the result

of having been treated in similar fashion, as if the Natives were one people. However, along with this cautionary note we should not underestimate the power of the bonds of shared experience. As the recent international indigenous writers, performing and visual artists conference, "Beyond Survival", demonstrated, these bonds are powerful and can unite people from Greenland to Zimbabwe to Brazil to Hawaii in a way that treaties and government negotiations never have. Perhaps this is because indigenous peoples share an understanding that has and still is forced to conform to other peoples' images of the Natives. In their own countries they are expected to agree, to reach consensus on a variety of complex issues such as constitutional amendments, self-government, aboriginal rights, and 'freedom of expression', even though they are distinct people spread over large, vastly different territories. That systems comprised of many voices constantly and consistently demand that they speak with one voice and then chastise and decide among them when they cannot or will not. Perhaps it is because together that they do not constantly have to explain constantly have to face opposition or doubt or disbelief. Perhaps it is because (more often than not) Natives have allowed each other to change, experiment and grow without calling each other's identity into question. Although within their cultural groups they can be very rigid in the expectations placed on their members, Natives seldom lock each other in to romanticised images that are possible to maintain.

In Canada, First Nations writers are often expected to write about certain issues, to share certain values, to use certain symbols and icons, to speak in certain ways. They are expected to know everything about their own cultures

and histories from land claims to spiritual practices to traditional dress. More than that, they are expected to know this for all 52 First Nations in Canada and, where applicable, in the United States.

So, who are we and what are we writing about if not that? Rayna Green in the "Introduction" to the anthology *That's What She Said : Contemporary Poetry and Fiction by Native American Women* says that

[The writers in this anthology] can be looking for something Indians call "Indianness" – what sociologists call "identity" and Bicentennial patriots called "heritage". Because most of them – with few exceptions – are "breeds", "mixed-blood", not reserve-raised, they aren't "traditional", whatever that might mean now (Green 7).

Many of the contemporary indigenous writers challenge Non-indigenous writers' way of seeing and subsequently writing about indigenous women. Contemporary indigenous writers positively and knowledgeably construct aspects of their cultures that have been previously misrepresented by outsiders who knew little about the cultures about which they wrote.' In this way, indigenous writers following the example of Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* significantly challenge literary trends. Writing from places of strength – their own specific cultures – these writers provide an abundance of new ways to see and thus understand indigenous peoples. Emma LaRocque strongly emphasises that:

.....there are just a thousand angles from which to see Native people – our vastness, our diversity, our different personalities, never mind, just plainly, our humanity. White North America, not to mention White European peoples, haven't even begun to see us. (198).

LaRocque's calling attention to the "thousand angles from which to see Native people" challenges the former monolithic "Indian" so prevalent in Euro-Canadian literature. However, while there are numerous cultural differences among indigenous peoples, there are also some very basic similarities.

Indigenous peoples share a common ideology premised on autochthony. This indigenous ideology significantly challenges many Euro-Canadians' formerly held beliefs about indigenous peoples, who were prior to Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, depicted in Canadian literature as pagans with no moral base, no rules, no values, and no developed political, social, or economic systems. In the interview with Hartmurt Lutz, Jeannette Armstrong explains that "with Native people... it's difficult for us to look at things in a separate way. Everything is part of something else. Everything is part of a continuum of other things: a whole" (16). Thomas King concurs; he suggests, with:

Native society there is the sense that everything is part of a living chain and you have to pay attention to what happens with the animals, with the environment. The world as an organic flow... we have a particular sense of the physical world that is so much a part of culture and so

much a part of the ceremonies and everything else. They are connected.
(116).

This connectedness, for most indigenous people, influences our way of seeing, being, and doing. It also challenges the traditionally-held notions in North American literature about indigenous people as being a dying race, the suffering victims with no hope of survival, or the "Native" bound and determined to assimilate and make it in the White world. Lee Meracle maintains:

For us, thinking is a complete and total process. In a sweat, or the Big House or whenever, around the pipe you harness all your energy, physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual, and you retreat into solitude to work out the nature of your particular solidarity with creation. And you retreat into lineage, as well, because the farther backward in time you travel, the more grandmothers you have, the farther forward, the more grand children! You actually represent an infinite number of people, and the only physical manifestation is yourself. Also, you own your "house" and that's all you own. It's this "house" that I live in. The "I" that lives in here is the thinking "I", the being "I", the "I" that understands creation, understands creation, understands that the object of life is solidarity, understands that there are consequences for every action. (172).

This peculiar way of relating to the environment, of seeing, being and doing has significantly influenced indigenous writers. Tomson Highway insists that

indigenous peoples have a mythology thousands of years old. Even though it has been severely eroded by Christian missionaries and their religion, Highway insists that the spirit of it has survived and is becoming even stronger (91). In "Tides, Towns, and Trains" Emma Larocque explains that Native cultures are "inextricably related to lands and resources" while she insists that Euro-Canadian culture "continues to invade these lands and resources, pulling the ground from under Native cultures, (and) creating a power / powerless relationship". (79)

For many indigenous writers, the act of writing thus becomes an act of resistance, an act of re-empowerment. Lee Meracle maintains that when indigenous people write, we are "reclaiming our house, our lineage house, our selves" (Lutz, 176). Emma LaRocque reinforces this idea. She insists that she took up writing in grade eight out of a need to "self-express because there was so much about our history and about our lives that....has been disregarded, infantilised, and falsified" (Lutz 181).

LaRocque maintains, consequently, that "I think I had this missionary zeal to tell about our humanity because Indian-ness was so dehumanised and Metis-ness didn't even exist" (181). Speaking with Lutz, LaRocque calls attention to her particular source of power, her strength. She explains that she comes "from a background of beautiful oral literature. Both my grandmother and my mother were fantastic storytellers and I think that influenced me" (183).

Tomsom Highway refers to his source of strength and influence in the preface to Geoffrey York's summary of the events at Oka in *The Dispossessed*. He writes:

...my parents are strong, beautiful people, are my numerous brothers and sisters. And they all, except for three, speak nothing but Cree and, in the case of my parents, Chipweyan. The White people whom I happened to meet and associate with along the way were, almost without exception, tremendously supportive and encouraging. With their help, I am now, like many Indians of my generations, able to go back to help my people --- equipped, this time, with the wisdom of Homer and Faulkner and Shakespeare and Bach and Beethoven and Rembrandt and McLuhan and many other thinkers, artists, and philosophers of the White world. But equipped, as well, with the wisdom and the vision of Big Bear and Black Elk and Chief Seattle and Tom Fiddler and Joe Highway and the medicine people, the visionaries of my ancestry - and the Cree language in all its power and beauty. At all times I have had the Trickster sitting beside me. In Cree we call him / her Weesauuechak....it is just unfortunate that his / her first meeting, seven lifetimes ago, with the central hero figure from that other mythology - Christian mythology - was so shocking and resulted in so many unpleasant occurrences (ix).

As Tomsom Highway's writing demonstrates, indigenous peoples in Canada tenaciously clung to our cultures, our way of seeing, being, and doing. Despite 400 years of cultural invasions, indigenous cultures have survived and are very much alive, in one way, through the mythology. During those invasions,

however, the mythology went underground and consequently contemporary indigenous peoples' spirits are infused with it. Indeed, Highway insists that, "There is a spirituality that still is so powerful and beautiful and passionate!" (Lutz 91).

Indigenous cultures and languages have survived, according to Maria Campbell, because of our relationship to the land, "the Mother" (Lutz 163). This maternal language base distinguishes indigenous peoples' languages and cultures, and therefore the writing, from non-indigenous peoples' language and writings which are rooted in a patriarchal hierarchy. Campbell maintains that for about four or five years she was very frustrated with her writing, or lack of it. She says:

I blamed the English language, because I felt that the language was manipulating me.

So I went to the old man who's been my mentor, my teacher, my grandfather,....I had talked to him about storytelling, but I never talked to him about what I felt the language was doing to me; going to him as a writer to another writer. And he just laughed, probably thinking, "Why didn't she come here a long time ago!" "It's really simple," he said, "why you have trouble with the English language, it's because the language has no Mother. This language lost its Mother a long time ago, and what you have to do is, put the Mother back in the language! And then I went away, and I thought, "Now, how am I going to put the Mother back in the

language?" Because, in our language and our culture, as well as Indian people's culture, Mother is the land (Lutz 49).

While a number of indigenous peoples, in their writing, proclaim their reconnection to the Mother, many writers engage themselves in the struggle against systemic and institutional racism. In *Writing the Circle's* preface, Emma LaRocque calls attention to the various types of "power politics in literature" that for too many years disempowered indigenous peoples by dismissing, romanticising, censoring, and labelling us" (xvi-xvii). She insists that indigenous peoples were not rendered voiceless despite very deliberate and institutionally sanctioned attempts to silence us. Indeed, indigenous peoples continue to write albeit often from the "margins" or from a position of "resistance".

Contrary to the "Natives" in White-Canadians writers' fiction, a good majority of indigenous peoples' texts thematically deal with survival of individuals, communities, and nations, just as Johnson's texts do. Thomas King, in his introduction to *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 60, argues that images constructed by "Native" writers are "quite unlike the historical and contemporary Native characters in White fiction" (8). He maintains that :

Rather than create characters who are inferior and dying, Native writers have consciously created Native characters who are resourceful, vibrant, and tenacious. Like traditional trickster figures, contemporary Native characters are frequently tricked, beaten up, robbed, deserted, wounded,

and ridiculed, but, unlike the historical and contemporary Native characters in White fiction, these characters survive and persevere, and, in many cases, prosper. Contemporary Native literature abounds with characters who are crushed and broken by circumstances and disasters, but very few of them perish. Whatever the damage, contemporary characters, like their traditional trickster relations, rise from their own wreckage to begin again. (8).

Putting the Trickster back among indigenous peoples re-establishes harmony and balance to indigenous peoples' way of being, seeing, and doing. The Trickster, according to Tomsom Highway, is an "extraordinary figure" without whom "the core of Indian culture would be gone forever" (*Dry Lips*, 13). Indeed, Highway writes:

The dream world of North American Indian mythology is inhabited by the most fantastic creatures, beings and events. Foremost among these is the "Trickster", as pivotal and important a figure in our world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology. "Weesegeechak" in Cree, "Nanabush" in Ojibway, "Raven" in others, "Coyote" in still others, this Trickster goes by many names and many guises. In fact, he can assume any guise he chooses. Essentially a comic, clownish sort of character, his role is to teach us about the nature and the meaning of existence on the planet Earth ; he straddles the consciousness of man and that of God, the Great Spirit. (12).

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias explains that the Trickster is also a “Teacher....a paradox; Christ like in a way. Except that from our Teacher, we learn through the Teacher’s mistakes as well as the teacher’s virtues” (Lutz, 85). As both Keeshig-Tobias and Highway suggest, Trickster, as the central culture hero for “Native” people, is comparable to Christ, the central cultural hero of Christianity’s first book, the Bible.

This very basic difference distinguishes indigenous peoples’ writing from non-indigenous peoples’ writing: indigenous peoples’ writing primarily grows out of a gynocratic-circular-harmonious way of life while non-indigenous peoples’ writing in Canada has primarily grown out of a Christian-patriarchal hierarchy. Contemporary indigenous writers who write from this ideological base thus challenge Canadian literary traditions by creating more knowledgeable and positive images that grow out of this ideology. Also, contemporary writers are constructing characters and plots based on Trickster, who can adopt any guise and is not confined to a specific gender. Many indigenous writers maintain Trickster survives incredibly challenging experiences only to live and begin again. Just as the traditional Trickster culture hero / fixer-upper survived great odds, contemporary indigenous writers are writing their cultures back into stability and thereby assuring survival.

Traditionally, the storytellers were the bearers of the traditions, the repository of myths, legends, and stories of the tribal people. What Silko and Erdrich do in their fiction that is different from the work of other contemporary novelists is to assume the role of the traditional communal storyteller as they creatively

approximate the storytelling situation in a written format. Silko's *Storyteller* and Erdrich's novels actualise a transitional text from the oral to the written that Lord does not find possible. In his often quoted article on the storyteller Nikolai Leskov, Walter Benjamin decries the fact that "the art of storytelling is coming to and" (83). He attributes this to the rise of the novel which he distinguished from other genres because "it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it" (87). I disagree. While Silko's *Storyteller* is not a novel, Erdrich's books clearly are. The focus of these works is to tell the story of their peoples' lives directly, through the communal tribal voices, and this approach had not been the underpinning structure for any other Native American novel before their books. The mythic (*The House Made of Dawn*, *Ceremony*) and the legendary (*Winter in the Blood*) have been dominant motifs for the best of contemporary Indian fiction, but the communal voice had been silent until Silko and Erdrich beautifully incorporated it as the voice in their works.

A communal voice is a true polyphony, and there is no one point of view just as there is no final version of a story. Stories are heard, interpreted, and retold by various members of the community who pass along their version. As Silko explains in *Storyteller*: all of remembering what we have heard together....create[s] the whole story....(7).

Erdrich and Silko are both receivers and bearers of their tribal stories. They tell the portion that they remember, and so keep alive and in process the ongoing energy in the everlasting circle. There is no one absolute definitive version of a story, a feature found in traditional storytelling. What is remembered, are

different versions which get retold in order to recreate the "truth" of the event. Silko attributes the stories in her collection to many different people at Laguna who remember the stories: Great-aunt Susie Marmon, Great-grandmother Maris Anaya Marmon, Grandma Lillie Marmon, Grandpa Hank Marmon, her father Lee Marmon Simon Ortiz, and herself. Likewise, Erdrich uses multiple narrators to tell the stories of her people: *Love Medicine* has six narrators, *Tracks* has two, *The Beet Queen* has six, *The Bingo Palace* has one plus the community, *Tales of Burning Love* has four, and *The Antelope Wife* has four (which includes a storytelling dog) and an unnamed storyteller who is the meta-narrator.

There is no distinct authorial voice for the stories in these works, a common feature of oral stories. Instead there is the voice of the community composed of fragmented individual perspectives who express through recounting their lives the very life of the community. No one voice is privileged over others, and no one truth reigns; and so diverse voices combine to become a communal voice and to tell a communal story. In this way, Erdrich and Silko seek to give the appearance to traditional storytelling by using several communal narrators.

Silko constructs *Storyteller* by narrating how she heard the tribal and family stories and myths in the same way that Erdrich manipulates the various voices of the Chippewa and German immigrant descendants. Erdrich juxtaposes these individual voices alongside an omniscient voice interspread throughout, acting as the arbitrator of the versions, filling in missing significant details, and explaining other points of view. Erdrich's fictional form is a rendering of a

traditional storytelling session in which differing people tell distinct versions of events and history for all to hear; and it positions her as a tribal storyteller, one who mediates and communicates varying versions of a communal truth. What has changed is the medium, from oral recitation to books, and the audience, from tribal to an unknown reading public.

Communal storytelling is a new form for Native American fiction. It incorporates the many voices of a tribal people, not just the historic, not just the legendary / mythic, but most of all the lives of the people who tell their stories. Lincoln has commented, "Indian storytelling, old and new, is drawn from living history. Its angle of truth derives from a belief in families telling their lives directly. Its sense of art turns on tribal integrity" (222). Likewise, Silko notes how communal storytelling acts as "A self-correcting process in which listeners were encouraged to speak up if they noted an important fact or detail omitted. The people were happy to listen to two or three different versions of the same event or the same humma-hah story. Even conflicting versions of an incident were welcomed for the entertainment they provided" ("Landscape" 88).

Silko and Erdrich tell family stories, stories that would be heard when people share a meal together, when they converse with one another about things they have just heard, when family members tell example-stories for the younger children so that they will learn a lesson and learn some history, and even when people gather to gossip about other people in the community. Silko has said that she does not like the term "gossip stories" because the inference is all wrong (Hirsch quoting from a *Sun-Track* interview), however gossip is certainly a

component in the stories told and heard. Silko's story about old man George and a younger woman fooling around who locked herself in an outdoor toilet when her five or six boyfriends confronted her are definitely communal gossip told as juicy tidbits and told as lesions in moral behaviour. Likewise, Erdrich's stories often retain the flavour of a juicy piece of gossip just heard, particularly when people talk about the amorous carryings on of Lulu Lamartine with her three husbands and numerous lovers. As Lulu herself declares, "I always was a hot topic" (LM 233).

Silko and Erdrich use different mediums to try and render as closely as a written work can a communal storytelling situation, for as Silko emphasises, stories are communal property. Silko utilises poems, myths, photographs, family stories, personal remembrances, and stories of friends as she serves as the storyteller for her community, telling the versions and bits that she remembers in a similar fashion to that of a traditional tribal storyteller. Bernard Hirsch has noted the circular design in this work which echoes a tribal way of seeing as well as seeming a remnant from oral performances. Silko's multitextual approach resembles a traditional storytelling session where dance, song, multiple levels of voice intonation, gesture, and expression act together to perform a story. Silko's *Storyteller* is a performance with a written text that is neither an oral rendering nor a contemporary novel, but rather a creative embodiment linking old and new ways of storytelling.

Critics have made comparisons between *Storyteller* and Momaday's two autobiographical works because of the experimental approach to the text that

both authors practice. Clearly there is a similarity in their use of poetry, photographs, and personal memories as the two writers try to create a living history of their people. What distinguishes the work of each from the other is the meta-narrative voice relating the diverse materials. Momaday, as in his other works, presents a very strong male voice that is both serious and highly literate. He is telling the story of his people, and the meta-voice is clearly his own. Krupat comments on this aspect of the text, "His writing offers a single, invariant poetic voice that everywhere commits itself to subsuming and translating all other voices". (*Voice* 180). This is in marked contrast to Silko's voice, which, as I have pointed out, is a communal one. She submerges her voice so that it blends in with the other voices of her family and community. She is the voice of the nurturing female who is concerned with the well-being of the entire tribal family. In her powerful novel *Ceremony*, she speaks with both male and female voice as Thought-Woman tell as the story of Tayo and his mythic healing through Ta'eh the mountain spirit. I quote again from Krupat who so precisely summarises how the memoirs of the two authors differ, "Silko's autobiographical writing is as firmly oriented toward dialogue and polyphony as Momaday's is toward monologue". (*Voice* 182). While their autobiographical works present a common format and can clearly be identified as transitional works, Momaday speaks primarily through his own voice while Silko approximates a communal voice.

Erdrich's novels are another attempt to approximate storytelling sessions through the use of multiple narrators, different versions of stories, and community anecdotes. Allen has pointed out that, although the novel is a fairly

new form for Native Americans, it is really nothing more than a series of long stories "that weave a number of elements into a coherent whole and, in their combinings, make significance of human and (for Native Americans, at least) non-human life" (*Spider* 4). She further explains that the folklorists have categorised this element in traditional novels a "cycles", where a number of stories with the same characters "clusters" around a prevailing theme. Dorris applies the same term when he comments on *Love Medicine*, "It is a story cycle in the traditional sense". (Coltelli, *Winged Words* 44, Chavkin and Chavkin, *Conservations* 22), thus situating the text within a particular set of assumptions: that stories are communal assets; that stories never have one version; that different versions of a story are the attempts by community members to amend, revise, or refute another person's version of an event; and that one story is only the beginning of many other stories.

Most Native writers today are not fluent speakers of one or another of the indigenous languages of America, yet all of them have indicated their strong sense of indebtedness or allegiance to the oral tradition. Even the mixed blood Anishanabe – Chippewa writer Gerald Vizenor, who uses quotations from European theorists has insisted on the centrality of "tribal stories" and storytelling to his writing. For contemporary Native American Writers, the storytelling of the oral tradition provides a context to the writing of their novels, poems, stories or autobiographies. According to Arnold Krupat, the oral tradition in these contexts is a kind of catch call phrase whose function is broadly to name the source of difference between the English of Native Writers and that of Euro-American writers.

Land rights is one of the major issues for aboriginals. The situation of contemporary aborigines is not very different in Australia. Instead of the confident assumption of identity tied to and established through links to a country, dispossession to some degree is their universal experience. However, the continuity between traditional and contemporary forms of cultural expression has encoded a nexus of rights and obligations towards the land. This quality made it equally well adapted to the needs of aborigines today, all of whom are in some respects fringe dwellers in their own land, needing a means of relocating themselves in White Australia, reconstructing an identity which is fully aboriginal yet adequate to the new situation. Many aboriginal groups in northern and central Australia are trying to re-establish traditional territories. The acrylic art of the western desert people and the maintenance of traditional languages are important to this strategy.

Kwame Anthony Appiah's account of the post colonial African novel provides some kind of ideological framework for understanding Native American novel as postcolonial texts. Appiah describes postcolonial African novel as falling into two fairly distinct stages. The first stage as "anticolonial and nationalist". These novels of the late 1950's and early 1960's are theorized as the imaginative recreation of a common cultural past that is crafted into a shared tradition by the writer..... "a return of tradition". However from the late 1960's, these celebrating novels of the first stage becomes rarer and a much more postrealist/post modernist novel, exemplified by Yambo Ouologuen's *LeDevoir de Violence* (1968) – Back to Violence began to be produced. Novels of this

second stage, "far from being a celebration of the nation..... are novels of delegitimation, rejecting both the Western imperialism, but also rejecting the nationalist project of postcolonial National bourgeoisie. The Native American novel began during the same period, with Mamaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), appears to authorize an attempt to "return to tradition" legitimising a tribalism, nationalism or conception of "Indianness" that it invents or constructs in more or less realist fashion for the world and also for the Native Americans.

Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), a book different from *Ceremony* has distinct affinities with Appiah's second stage postcolonial African novel. For this novel, unlike *Ceremony*, it is not set in the mid 1940s but in the horrific present where drug deal, the pornography of torture, traffic in weapons and elaborate cynical real estate scams define the western "Culture of Death" in America.

Griffith and Tiffin's define the term post colonialism, "to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupation throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression" (1989). This definition perhaps lies closer to Natives of North America, who even today remain in a semi-apartheid state with subtle form of internal colonialism in their continuous segregation at all major socio-political levels.

The reason for the growth of post-colonial enterprise was the shift in a new radical theory to take into consideration the disposed and the peripheral. In

Homi Bhabha's words, "a range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history – subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement – that we learn our most enduring lesson for living and thinking. There is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality.... transforms our critical strategies" (Mukherjee 4). In this upsurge of marginality, the discourse of 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, nation, class, eurocentricism as well as condition of marginality, migration and minoritization. All these issues surface in Native Indian cultural identity gets problematized and resolved. At the same time, as any other post-colonial discourse, Native literature is one way of "demystifying, Eurocentric discourse" (Said 40).

Colonialism along with imperial aggression consequenced destruction of the colonized at all possible levels, leading to a crisis in identity. Most post-colonial writers like Chenua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Nguigi, Rushdie etc. Portray a sense of alienation and identity crisis in their works. The Native Indians dilemma of identity continues, ever since their discovery by Columbus in 1492, that led to their dispossession both socially and economically. The subtle cultural interaction between the Europeans and the Native Indians, which otherwise were distinct from each other, constituted to the divide between the colonizer and the colonized on the basis of relationship of power.

The imperial colonial history of the Native people was marked by unscrupulous dealing like land treaties and fur trading. Not only the economy, but the cultural subjugation of the Native Indian was heightened by the destructive role of priest and Christian missionaries who propagated that Indians were heathens who needed to be tamed and civilized. The humanity of the Native Indians was questioned and problematized their identity.

No longer is the dominant culture speaking for them, interpreting their feeling, religion, and way of life. No longer are Indians represented by Anglos in a way that is pleasing or sensational, a commodity to be enjoyed and dismissed. Allen explains in an interview with Laura Coltelli that in Native American literature, Indian authors are finally able to take back the images of them given by Hollywood and the anthropologists and "claim themselves" (18). No longer are Native people subjected to the stereotypes forced on them, as Niatum points out in his thoughtful article "On Stereotypes". The fictionalised and romanticized Chingachgook, Hiawatha, and Ramona are finally replaced with portraits of "real" Indian people written by Indians.

Therefore, in the twentieth century with most Native peoples settled on reservations, the old ways were irrevocably gone. The pressure from missionaries, the boarding schools, and the BIA to adopt a more "civilized" lifestyle left Native people stranded between two worlds. To return to their traditional homelands and Anglo world would necessitate negotiating their Indian heritage. The struggles with identity and injustices found a new arena in which to be fought in the twentieth century. With tribal members having access

to schooling, widespread advanced literacy became the opportunity for Indians to use writing as the most powerful of political tools. They could now read the treaties, write their histories, and present their stories to the reading world. Literacy brought the opportunity for Native Americans to tell their stories and to become a potent voice in the American political system. For the first time, large numbers of Americans Indian were able to use the English language with an Anglo audience.

As Native people became more acculturated, intermarried with other Americans, and moved in to the cities, their opportunities for advanced education increased. With the advent in the last half of the twentieth century Native Americans in larger numbers attending college and becoming more fluent in English than in their Indian language, the conditions for a new group of Native American storytellers arose. These storytellers are not tribal elders but rather well educated Indians of various tribal origins and with mixed amounts of Indian ancestry who seized up on literacy as a persuasive tool for revising and transforming Anglo America's portrait of Indians. These college educated acculturated writers used the pen to lead the way in creating a literary/political tradition that became the vehicle by which Indian voices entered the American mainstream.

Despite the much professed idea of American "Melting Pot" theory and the "Canadian Mozaic", the Native Indians remain in a state of deprivation and dispossession. Their history is therefore a painful saga of the evils of colonialism that persists in a subtle form even today. In order to reclaim their

lost sense of selfhood and identity, in the 20th century the Native Indians have waged varied legal and political battles. It is significant to note that at this juncture, the frontier settler in both North American nations spawned important reform movements. The 1960s 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. An era of protest and activism, it saw the formation of National Indian Youth Council (1961) and American Indians Movement in Minneapolis in 1968, that provided the organizational backbone of Native Indian activism in the twentieth century. With the publication of news papers like *Indians Historian* and *Akwesash Note*, Native Indian history and culture become a topic of serious study in educational institutions. By the end of the sixties Native culture and identity became serious issues that took a vibrant turn with the resurgence movement of 1960's. The literature became just an additional medium to express and celebrate this vitality. With Harold Cardinal's *The Unjust Society* (1969), a seminal book on Native nationalism, the Native Indian with the growing group consciousness started to articulate their demands and express their grievances. In the words of H.Lutz, "Their cultural identity in writings, using English as the lingua franca of pan-Indian inter-tribal communications" (173), the Native Indians made their way to reclaim their cultural identity. The search for a distinctive Native identity is precisely the search for an identity akin to all post-colonial nations who suffer from a fractured sense of the self from centuries of colonial rule. The Native Indian's quest for identity gains momentum in the post 1960's where Native political resurgence called for greater deal of urgency and vehemence to resolve this identity crisis. Therefore most of the contemporary Native writers,

be it fiction, poetry drama, make an examination of this issue in their literary output to create a distinctive Native sense of place/space in North American word of letters.

According to Gayatri Spivak, in a post-colonial order such a kind of essentialism can be regarded as the formation of a subaltern group. This subaltern group, both by speaking for marginality and against it, tries to exploit the Native Indian's status in the power politics of the hegemonic order and destabilize the institutional structures. Hence issues like appropriation, racism and colonial past, history and search for the self, myths and oral tradition, mainstream/othered difference are some of the recurrent motifs in most Native texts in the extended debate on Native cultural identity.

Appropriation too is one form of Eurocentricism to justify the hierarchical difference between Native/non-Native and remains a live concern for the Native writers. Since disparity and division characterize relations between the Whites and Native culture only a few dozen works by White directly concern the red culture. As Leslie Monkman in his book *A Native Heritage : Images of the Indian in English Canadian Literature*, says White writers, "select from red culture elements that, illuminate the world of the White man rather presuming to give on authentic voice to the point of view of red man" (1981)

Coupled with appropriation and stereotyping, the post-colonial writers also intervene White/Native dialectical opposition enhanced by racist attitudinal patterns of conversion and European style of education. The societal structures

are created on racial grounds and make the us/them hegemonic divide more sharp and visible. Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, an autobiographical account chronicles the development of the protagonist from skidrow girl to an activist. It highlights the segregation policy of school system where the White sat on the room and the halfbreeds on the other. Similarly *In Search of April Raintree* by Culleton contextualizes the dialectics of assimilate/ perish by the fictional construction of the two sisters. Such subtle form of internal colonialism with racial difference has been one of the major reasons of under development of the Natives.

The 1960s was not only important for its civil movement, but also for the movement of women's emancipation. As a result, many Native women writers came to the forefront and expressed their grievances. In an emergent postcolonial country, woman's place deserves special attention within the broader project of self-definition by the writers. Native women enter feminist space to contest the issues of race and gender related differences. Unlike their White counterparts, Colonialism for Native women operates in two ways – White and the male. Racism and sexism are therefore inherent part of their lives that get manifested in their creative pursuit.

Writers like Beatrice Culleton, Maria Campbell, Lee Meracle and Louise Erdrich etc. explore the patriarchal structures of power and domination within male-female relationship. In the narrative quests of their women protagonists they typify the emergence of a strong feminist politics in the post sixties. In a subtle manner they deconstruct the pattern of racism and sexism in White dominated

North American society. As stories of lost identities by racial and sexual subjugation the narrative captures painful account of colonialism within Jan Mohammad's concept of "Manichean aesthetics". Native writers discover the process of recovering a holistic identity by coming to terms with the past and reconciling it with the present in his male protagonist's quest for individual identity through memories, dreams and vision of the pre- contact days. The fictional construction of the acculturated Indian caught in the dilemma of past and present metaphorically reflects the colonial experience in North America which has further severely affected the acquisition of an adequate Native Indian identity. Similarly Jeannette Armstrong calls for a similar kind of decolonization through Native revisioning of the self. Written in the manner of revisionist historiography, Armstrong tries to give a Native perspective on the North American Indian protest movement of 1960's and 1980's as means to reclaim the route to self-determination.

In aboriginal philosophy, existence consists of energy. All things are animate, imbued with spirit and in constant motion. The idea of all things being in constant motion or flux leads to holistic and cyclical view of the world. In Plain Indian philosophy certain events, patterns, cycles take place in certain places. The Earth is where the continuous or repetitive process of creation occurs. If creation has to continue it needs to be renewed as well. Renewal ceremonies, the telling and re-telling of creation stories, singing of songs contribute to the maintenance of creation. Hence the sundance, societal ceremonies, the unbundling of medicine bundles at certain phases of the year – are interrelated aspects of happening that take place on and within Mother Earth.

The storytelling tradition is at the heart of most contemporary Native fiction, which means that writer/storyteller 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.

As time is cyclical, not linear for the Natives, stories do not end with their telling, but rather continue transformed in a circular manner, to link to other stories. The image of the circle is abundant in tribal life from the sacred medicine wheels to the round warrior shields, to the cyclical nature of the seasons, Native animals. This element in contemporary American fiction marks its "otherness" in a manner similar to that of which the elements of the oral tradition shape Indian Literature today. Paula Gunn Allen's *Sacred Hoop* and Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, which begins and ends with June's story are but two examples of this operating principle in Native American Literature.

Connected to the circular image is the Native concept of the relatedness of all things. Peoples, animals, nature co-exist and are an integral part of the whole. For instance Erdrich novels are interlocking stories of people and the land they occupy : Chippewa and immigrant people who populate a specific region in North Dakota and Minnesota and other Native writers/poets who speak as Ojibway or Anishnabe, Okanagan, Kwantlen, etc.

The discussion above makes it quite clear that in their search for a distinct Native "self", Native writers reflect "both indigenous tradition and colonial situation" (Lutz). The Native Indian's use of narrative modes like oral narration, mythical parallels and allegories create a distinctness of Native Indian Literature as a whole. It echoes Achebe's call for distinctiveness of literature because "it must speak of a particular place, evolve out of the necessities of its history past and current and the aspiration and destinies of its people" (Dhar 143). This distinctiveness is part of the global call for decolonisation from the colonial regime. In order to build up their identity, the colonized group in both settler/non-settler colonies have questioned the hegemonic power for their colonizing principles.

WORKS CITED

Adams, Howard. *A Tortured People : The Politics of Colonisation*.
Pentinction; British Columbia : Theytus Books, 1995.

_____. *Prison of Grass*. Saskatchewan : Fifth House Publishers, 1975.

_____. *The Empire Writes Back : Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial
Literatures*. London : Routledge, 1989.

Ashcroft Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *The Post-Colonial
Studies Reader*. London : Routledge, 1995.

Baptistic, Maric, ed. *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*. Vancouver :
UBC Press, 2000.

Barton, Willow. "Where have the Warriors gone?" *Writing the Circle :
Native Women of Western Canada*. Ed Jean Perrault and Sylvia
Vance. Edmonton : NeWest Publishers, 1990.

Bhabha, H. K. "Remembering Fanon : Self, Psyche and the Colonial
Condition" in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse
and Post Colonial Theory*. New York : Colombia University Press.
112-123.

Campbell, Maria. *Halfbreed*. Halifax : Goodread Biographies, 1983.

Culleton, Béatrice. *In Search of April Raintree*. Winnipeg : Pemmican
Publication, 1983.

Dhar, T. N. "History, Myth and the Post-Colonial : The Indian Context."
Interrogating Post-Colonialism Theory, Text and Context. Ed. Harish
Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee. I.I.A.S. : Shimla, 1996.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Poets and Prophets*. New York : Mentor Books,
1972.

Gilbert Bart, Moore. *Post Colonial Theory : Contexts, Practices, Politics*.
London & New York : Verso, 1998.

Gilroy, P. *The Black Atlantic : Modernity and Double Consciousness*.
Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1993.

Hulam, Renee, ed. *Native North America : Critical and Cultural
Perspectives*. Toronto : ECW Press, 1999.

Johnston, Basil H. "One Generation from Extinction." *Native Writers and
Canadian Writings*. Ed. W. H. New. Vancouver : UBC Press, 1990.

LaRoque, Emma. "The Uniform of the Dispossessed." *Writing the Circle :
Native Women of Western Canada*. Ed. Jean Perrault and Sylvia
Vance. Edmonton : NeWest Publishers, 1990.

Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism / Postcolonialism*. New York : Routledge, 1998.

Mannoni, O. *Prospero and Caliban : The Psychology of Colonialism*. New
York : Praeger, 1964.

Memmi, Albert. *The Coloniser and the Colonised*. New York : Orien Press,
1965.

Meracle, Lee. *I am a Women*. Vancouver : Write-on Press Publishers, 1988.

Mihesuah, A Devon, ed. *Natives and Academics : Researching and Writing about American Indians*. Lincoln : Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1998.

Monkman, Leslie. *A Native Heritage : Images of the Indian in English – Canadian Literature*. Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1981.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi. "Interrogating Post-Colonialism." *Interrogating Post-Colonialism Theory, Text and Context*. Ed. Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee. Shimla : I.I.A.S., 1996.

Ortiz, Simon. J, ed. *Speaking for the Generations : Native Writers on Writing*. Tucson : University of Arizona Press, 1998.

Ruffo, Armond Garnet, ed. *(Ad)dressing Own Words : aboriginal Perspectives on aboriginal Literatures*. Penticton : Theytus Book, 2001.

Ryga, George. *Ecstasy of Rita Joe and Other Plays*. Ed. Brian Paralke. Toronto : New York : Random House, 1971.

Said, E.W. *Orientalism*. London and Henley : Routledge and Kegan, 1978.

Savage, William. W. *Indian Life : Transforming an American Myth*. New York : Random House, 1976.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. New York : Penguin Books, 1986.

Slemon, Stephen. "Introductory Notes : Post-Colonialism and its Discontents." *ARIEL : A Review of International English Literature*. 26. I (January 1995) : 7-11.

Slipperjack, Ruby. *Silent Words*. Saskatchewan : Fifth House Publishers, 1992.

Wiebe, Rudy. *The Temptations of Big Bear*. Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1984.