Chapter 1

Locating Diane Glancy

The focus of the present study is on the exploration of various critical aspects in Diane Glancy’s plays, which make it unique in terms of questions related to identity against a marginalised sociocultural context. These include the structural elements which contribute to her highly experimental body of work, the question of survival in the context of sociocultural collisions, and the empowered status of her women characters. In the process, we can discern the manner in which culture and conflicts operate in the creation of a dynamic social fabric which becomes crucial while negotiating issues related to survival in a marginalised context.

The present chapter will attempt to position Diane Glancy (1941-) within the context of the development of Native American theatre, American Women’s theatre and the context of feminism. Diane Glancy is a prolific Native American woman playwright of mixed heritage. While she inherited the Arkansian backhill culture mixed with Cherokee heritage from her father’s side, the Anglo culture’s “will, order and persistence” came from her German mother. However, in spite of her “marginalised” location, Glancy’s voice appears to be empowered, especially in the context of her plays.

While classifying Glancy’s work as contemporary Native American drama would be crucial to such a study, it also becomes necessary to critically position Glancy as a woman playwright, especially with reference to the feminist movement and its impact on theatre. This necessitates the references will be made to other women playwrights, whose significant efforts ensured the presence of a woman’s voice on the American stage. Their
critical positioning may differ from that of Glancy but concerns remain similar. After a discussion on the critical terms of reference in each chapter, attempt will be made to study Glancy’s position as a Native American woman playwright.

The original idea of Native American theatre, which was rooted in tradition and ritual, was modelled around the legends and the history of the community. Most of the theatrical performances were actually ceremonies, in which the audience was an integral part vital to the success of the performance. While the traditional elements of a play constitute a significant portion of such a performance, the most discernible aspect is the combination of storytelling and playacting to establish a connection with the intended audience. Use of complex literary devices like images and metaphors further enables the audience to perceive the multi-layered perspectives presented in the ceremony.

The Native American consciousness is shaped both by communal marginalization and a sense of dislocation which by itself is symptomatic of a larger sense of identity crisis. Having been in the mode of migration ever since the sixteenth century, the Native American stories of systematic exploitation have largely gone unrecorded. There were two reasons for this. First, most of the written literature, that too in English, of the Native Americans happened only at the beginning of the twentieth century and these for the most part were devoted to propagating the idea of the “noble savage”. Secondly, the systematic “assimilation” that had been originally conceived of by George Washington in the late 18th century to “civilize” the Natives ensured their dislocation. Since performances were built around legends, history of the community and ceremonies, there was a significant impact on them when the communities were broken up and displaced. By extension, the attempts to engage with the mainstream cultural discourse were also limited. Moreover,
the vast range and variety of performances ensured that contemporary Native American Theatre often received limited critical and scholarly attention (Janet Neil Snyder 453).

Mary “Te Ata” Thompson Fisher (1895 – 1995) was one of the earliest pioneers to make significant attempts at forging an aesthetic for contemporary Native American theatre. While discussing her contributions, Christy Stanlake remarks that Te Ata’s career “represents the many challenges and difficult decisions Native American performers faced at the turn of the twentieth century” (2). She had pursued her theatrical career to the Broadway through the academic route.² Since her purpose was not just to achieve commercial success, but also to educate her audiences about the heritage of Native Americans, her shows often combined Native American storytelling with classical acting. Her one-woman performances were actually a protest against the stereotypical “exotic” roles in which she was often cast.

The earliest representations of Native American culture seemed to uphold the idea of the “noble savage” rather than expose the diffused realities of Native American life. This is precisely because they were reported, recorded and sometimes fictionalised by outsiders. Stanlake remarks that theatre studies during this period of time were often marked by a general inability to see a contemporary Native presence in American theatre. Sarah Blackstone makes the crucial point about the marginalization and the simplification of the Native American within the model of a stereotypical representation. She says, “The dominant white culture in American has long been content to view the Native American as a representative of a single homogenous culture (Indian) and within the binary construct of noble savage/barbarian” (9).
However, the Civil Rights movement changed the scenario for Native American Theatre. The political Civil Rights movement of 1960s provided the necessary push for people to celebrate their ethnicity and to view themselves as far from being the constituents of a melting pot that was called America. A greater need was felt to draw public attention to the issues affecting the Native Americans. Vine Deloria Jr used the word “Red Power” to describe a growing sense of pan Indian identity amongst the Native Americans in the 1960s. The primary objective of the Red Power movement as far as literature was concerned was to reclaim the representations of Native Americans and to draw public attention to the issues affecting Native Americans especially in a marginalised and dislocated context. Further, the Red Power Movement promoted a revival of traditional religion and ceremonies (Jenkins 159).

Drama became a medium for doing this because in 1960s a combination of the experimental theatre and the political motivations created a fertile ground for the formation of Native American theatre companies. These theatre companies were not just devoted to the preservation and transmission of the original rites and rituals of the Native American culture, but also to viewing them from the dislocated and marginalised perspective and see what stays at the end of the whole process.

The Native American Renaissance in Drama was signalled by the establishment of the Institute of American Indian Arts in 1962 through a Congressional charter. The objective of this academy was to offer Native students a formal education in Arts tempered by Native American creative processes and traditions (Stanlake 8). The Theatre Department, started in 1969, was devoted to studying the dramaturgical expressions that were central to the Native American theatre. In 1974, the Native Theatre School was
established in Toronto for the creation of academic and educational environment to support the development of Native actors, playwrights and directors. In addition to this, groups like the Thunderbird Theatre and Native American Theatre Ensemble were quite active in the areas of performance and playwriting.

The Spiderwoman Theatre blended fantasy and reality to examine issues of identity in the past and the present. In the process, feminist sensibilities were combined with Native American dramaturgical elements to portray the deeper insecurities at the core of a Native woman’s consciousness. Formed in 1976 by the three sisters Lisa Mayo, Gloria Miguel and Muriel Miguel, it is the oldest running women’s theatre company in North America (Larry Abbott 166). Though the materials and the techniques used by them were freewheeling, they adhered to the traditional pattern of story weaving, a direct inspiration from the Hopi goddess Kokyanwuutí, who taught people how to weave. The weaving aspect of their performance appears in the interweaving of the types of stories which include personal memories, family stories, traditional myths, songs and events etc. With the help of an improvisatory style of narrative discourse, they used theatre to draw the attention of their audiences to serious issues related to identity crisis. In fact, with Sun, Moon and Feather in 1981, they began to solely focus on issues relating to the representation of Native American women. The significant aspect of the Spiderwoman Theatre was their emphasis on non-exclusivity since they often worked with artists of Native and non-Native heritage.

The establishment of Native Voices at the Illinois State University in 1994 represents a significant shift in the approach of the Native American theatre companies. Far from allying with the Civil Rights movement, or the feminist theatre groups,
professional Native American theatre companies began to forge creative partnerships with organizations that could increase the visibility of Native American theatre in the commercial domain. Native Voices is an example of one such instance for the creation of scripts for commercial theatre. In 1999, Native Voices partnered with Los Angeles’ Autry Museum to create Native Voices at the Autry. Project HOOP (Honouring Our Origins and People through Native Theatre, Education and Community Development), established in 1997, works on the premise that “theatre is one of the most accessible performing arts”. It functions in alliance with the University of California, Los Angeles. In 2005, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian launched the Native Theatre Program, which has an inclusive vision of producing Native American plays for Native and non-Native audiences. In 1997, the Native American Women Playwrights Archive, which remains the most comprehensive resource domain for Native American Women playwrights, was established in collaboration with the Miami University. The organization, which welcomes playwrights “at any level of development”, strives to “identify playwrights, collect and preserve their work, try to make it widely known, and encourage performances and continued creativity”.

The most immediate shift in perspective that we can see in plays by Native American playwrights is their effort to ensure that their works do not just become “informed insider commentaries” but draw a correlation with their life experiences. By implication the processes of such theatre would include attempts to portray and objectify experiences, the progression of the characters towards survival in the context of dislocation and marginalization, and the correlation between art and life experiences. Stanlake defines Native American drama as a field of theatre which focuses on plays
authored by members of indigenous nations of the American Western hemisphere. She describes such plays as both “secular” and “intertribal” since they are generally not tied down to any specific Native American religion. Moreover, they address issues which are relevant to most of the people across the Native Americans, rather than bearing allegiance to any single tribe (17).

While contemporary Native American drama has assumed the “secular” and the “intertribal” nature over a period of time, it becomes crucial to note that much of the development in Native American theatre took on the aspect of resistance against colonization and the resulting marginalization. This resistance usually appeared in the form of challenging the traditional Western dramatic structure through various experiments in the idea of time and the narrative patterns. However, contemporary Native American plays like those of Diane Glancy also present an interesting alternative vision of drama as a site for healing and survival. This necessitates the conception of Native American theatre as a theatre in flux but not as a monolithic canon of reference. It encompasses all issues of identity ranging from social and family ties to cultural and religious affiliations by extending the boundaries of theatre. For instance, in her plays, Glancy often presents a powerful “alternate vision” of how the margins of theatre can be extended into the personal and the spiritual, all in the hope of creating a space for survival. While doing so, Glancy joins the ranks of numerous women playwrights of the United States, who were also forging their attempts at creating a space for the emergence of the woman’s voice, with all its attendant conflicts and ironies. For a better comprehension of Glancy’s location as a mixed breed Native American Woman playwright, it also becomes essential to consider certain significant women playwrights
of the United States, who have also tried to create such “alternate visions”, working especially from a marginalised context.

Helen Krich Chinoy remarked in an essay: “It has not been easy to see a female network in the composite art of theatre or to find a sense of “we-consciousness” among actresses, playwrights, designers, directors and producers” (Sourcebook 23). During the 1960s and 70s, the feminist movement in the United States tried to correct this glaring lacuna by providing the necessary fillip to create the crucial “we-consciousness” and pave the way for increased visibility for American women playwrights. Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963) helped women realize that they were not alone in feeling that they were imprisoned. Hence, the personal and the individual became the political and the collective. To depict the processes involved in such a transformation, the experimental theatres provided the necessary processual and aesthetic support. Workshop theatres became popular and the idea of “script in motion” gained currency because there were playwrights like Maria Irene Fornes who structured their script based on audience response. Most of these playwrights or groups did not work for the commercial theatre. Since their ultimate aim was to raise the consciousness and awareness among women, they mostly functioned as non-profit ventures. In a way, the playwrights of this period were in a transitional phase since their efforts were to bring the experiences of women from the periphery to literally the centre of the stage.

Megan Terry worked towards a theatre which was radically different from the “commercially closed theatre” of Broadway. Her plays focused on capturing the environment of the women who try to redefine their lives in terms of their relationships with community, society and men. As a result, “transformation” as a means of
dramatizing the instability of character became a central convention of her plays (Sally Burke 153). Naturally this involved a disruption of the conventions of a realist theatre. Transformation scenes became very essential to the politics of writing a play. The new understanding was that women’s experiences are not linear but fluid in nature which means that the action in the play should proceed contiguously. A natural byproduct of such transformation scenes and the attendant fluid narratives was the establishment of the contexts in which sharing and empathy between the female characters became an achievable goal. Terry’s *Calm Down Mother* (1964) had three woman characters assuming the various roles as opposed to the usual norm of one character assaying a single role. *Viet Rock* (1966) was the play that brought critical attention to Terry’s work, by its virtue of being the first play to discuss the fall out of the Vietnam War on the life of the American public. It was also the first rock musical ever written. Terry’s objective was to survey the justifications for the Vietnam War and expose that there was indeed nothing that was “beautiful” about it. The play abounded in images and settings that allowed for transformations between characters and contexts. In a manner symptomatic of breaking the barriers between the performers and the audience, the performers walk into the audience asking questions regarding the mindless death unleashed by war. *Approaching Simone* (1969) was different from her earlier works because of its focus on a single woman. The ensemble element makes its presence felt in the externalisation of Simone’s experiences, while the other actors take on different elements of characterization and also function as a Greek Chorus. This enables Simone to live through various transformations, literally evolving from one position to another. Helene Keyssar feels that Simone’s suicide at the age of 34 appears as both weakness and strength in Terry’s play
(Cambridge Companion 185). While suicide by itself is an act imbued with negativity and characterized by withdrawal, in Terry’s play, it attains the status of asserting the autonomy of the self, an idea that finds echoes in Marsha Norman’s ‘night Mother (1983) and Diane Glancy’s The Lesser Wars (1999).

Issues of female autonomy figure prominently in Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun (1959), which also focused on the ambivalence and the exclusion that surrounds the idea of “American Dream”. With its hints of feminine strength, Alice Childress’ Wines in the Wilderness (1969) attempted to streamline the contradictions raised by the conflicts between the values and aspirations of the middle class society and the Black consciousness, more specifically, the consciousness of a Black woman who is determined to remain unconventional. Helene Keyssar describes the character of Tommy as “one of the first genuinely independent women of the America Stage” (Feminist Theatre 33) who fights for her autonomy within the context of responsibility and trust.

Through such characters Childress not only questioned the stereotyped images of women that theatre had traditionally portrayed but also offered a correction to the stage representation of women with reference to history and culture.

Adrienne Kennedy had her first experience of racial and cultural hatred in the Ohio State University. The engendered anger had a lasting impression on her sensibilities and later found expression in her plays. Quite pertinently, Kennedy termed her plays as a “growth of images” (Sally Burke 162). In her quest to depict the fragmented realities of the self, she fell back on exploring the inner psychological questions that arise directly as a result of the sociocultural collisions from a marginalised perspective. The inspiration for Funnyhouse of a Negro (1964) apparently came during an extended trip that Kennedy
had taken of Europe and Africa. She felt that the colonialist power of Europe was aptly symbolized by a mammoth statue of Queen Victoria which she had seen in front of the Buckingham Palace. The play was coloured with expressionistic techniques used to portray the consciousness of Sarah, a Negro woman who is marginalised under the twin banes of being a woman and a Negro. Race and gender collide to create a “funnyhouse” in her mind, which can be discerned in the conflict she faces between killing her father and forgiving him for the Blackness that he has inflicted upon her. In a way, the play takes a look at those very social and cultural structures that contribute to the dissolution of a woman’s brain into a “funnyhouse”. This is typified by Sarah’s fragmentation into four selves – Duchess of Hapsburg, Queen Victoria Regina, Jesus and Patrice Lumumba. Since the act of subsuming one’s self within the confines of another identity is fraught with tension which borders on violence, Sarah hangs herself at the end of the play. Therefore suicide emerges not as a construct signifying resignation, but as a mode of asserting the autonomy of Sarah’s fragmented sense of identity.

The 1970s saw a kind of alignment of the feminist groups, which had its impact on theatre. The most powerful and cost-effective medium to reach out to communities of women was theatre. The feminist theatre groups would perform even in attics for selected audiences. The issues now were not just those of greater autonomy for women, but those of a greater need for sharing of experiences and the telling of stories that had hitherto been confined to the domestic realms of a household. There was a greater critical interest that was displayed towards women playwrights, due to the sheer proliferation of their mostly non-commercial theatre groups. These efforts were mostly directed towards raising the consciousness of women towards the increasingly complex issues that they
have to negotiate through their lives. The issues could range from silent abuse validated by the patriarchal norm of the community that the woman is living in to pushing the case for lesbianism and heralding it as a part of the woman’s sense of autonomy to choose her partner.

What remains more pertinent to this study is the fact that the quest for identity assumed greater complexity during this period, with the introduction of psychoanalytic techniques to examine the issues of race, gender, and identity. Consciousness raising of women became the primary motive of most of the plays written during this period. If we consider the feminist theatre groups of this period, the emphasis seemed to be more on staging the personal experience of the characters on stage. Charlotte Canning notes that the development of feminist theatre groups was made possible through the belief in the importance of everyday experiences (Feminist Theatres in the U.S.A 39). The most widely accepted principle of the feminists was that women’s oppression worked by obscuring what women experienced. Perhaps the greatest contribution of the feminist theatre, as observed by Charlotte Rea, was to use as their raw material an area of experience that was virtually unknown in theatre history: the consciousness of women as seen through women’s consciousness (Sourcebook 37). The Woman’s Theatre Council of which Megan Terry was a part became a model for the feminist groups. This new network of women playwrights used theatre as a medium to look at both their past and their present. Since sustained narratives based on the traditional structure of beginning, middle and end were found to be incompatible with the issues which these women wanted to explore, brokenness and fragmentation dominated the structural patterns of the plays.
After the dominance of the feminist theatre groups in the seventies, there followed in the eighties, the inevitable period of decline. The reasons for the decline of the feminist theatre groups were quite obvious. In most cases, funding and power struggles in addition to a lack of a firm ideological cause and craft of staging played a major role in the demise of theatre groups. Helene Keyssar also identified tensions amongst the group members about race, poverty, gender and target audiences as one of the causes for their decline (Cambridge Companion 176). Another reason that could be ascribed to the non-proliferation of the feminist theatre groups is that the feminist concerns saw a major shift in their focus after the eighties. Quite naturally, the new question was what would make a play “feminist”.

New ideas on women and their place in the social and the cultural dynamics led to the realisation that a reworked understanding of culture and faith was needed to come to terms with the conflicting demands placed on them. Helene Keyssar feels that after this period, dominance of the plays which just superficially describe the themes of sexuality, sisterhood, mother-daughter relationships and female autonomy happened mostly because of the need to make gender issues palatable to the wider audience of the theatre. According to her there is no deeper analysis of the social, cultural and political structures that contributed to this problem in the first place. She places Marsha Norman and Wendy Wasserstein in such a category of playwrights since they fired the commonplace events that happen in the lives of women to the heights of dramatic intensity, thereby ensuring that their plays, though they engaged with women and their lives, retreated to the form and structure of a comedy of manners and for the most part were based on sustained narratives. For example, Keyssar criticizes Wendy Wasserstein’s Uncommon Women and
Others (1977) for its inability to break the stereotyped images of women and confirming the message that women have been “trained to accept a limited set of options and restricted levels of aspirations”, an idea that can possibly extended to The Heidi Chronicles (1988) as well.

Laurin Porter feels that plays by Marsha Norman comes closest to being awarded a canonical status since they present a strong feminist vision, exploring what happens when women are allowed to author their own stories (Cambridge Companion 200). Norman’s use of realistic structures invited criticism, especially from material feminists who argued that her plays do not form part of the corpus of feminist drama precisely because the feminist sensibilities do not permit realistic modes of narration. However, when we view realism only as a mode and not as an ideology, Norman’s dramatic strategies become agencies for revealing the realities behind the masks that the women assume and the hollowness of the beliefs that they had been taught to believe in. Laurin Porter’s argument shifts the focus of the feminist play from structural devices to narrative strategies. For example, Getting Out (1977) has a realistic structure but an unconventional narrative in which the past and the present often coalesce. In addition to locating the source of the disturbance in the landscape and the environment of the protagonist, the play also looks at her mindscape thereby leading us more on the path of empathy rather than prescriptive solutions.

Ntozake Shange carried the idea of experimentation a step forward with her verse drama for colored girls who have considered suicide (1975) which incorporated verse with drama. Shange realised the dramatic potential of this ensemble which was originally a combination of seven poems meant to be performed. She used song and dance to unite
these fragments and created what she called a “choereopoem”. She proved that serious
drama, especially the variety that discusses the state of women, can always include music
and dance simply because music and dance are not just cultural realities but a part of the
consciousness of Black experience. The narrative in the play proceeds on the lines of
storytelling which is a major component of the Black consciousness. Through these
narratives, the play makes a powerful appeal for sharing of pain and suffering amongst
the community of women. Quite appropriately there is no single protagonist because
rarely do the women initiate the actions that result in such horrifying consequences for
them. By this very gesture, Shange brings the cultural landscape into question and holds
it responsible for the experiences of these women.

Wendy Wasserstein’s plays examine both the traditional idea of womanhood and
the ideologies perpetuated by the feminist groups and expose their hollowness in the
context of the individual lives of women. Caught between two conflicting sets of values,
she felt that women of her generation were left confused about what they should stand
for, an irony brought out in Uncommon Women and Others. In Isn’t It Romantic (1983),
Jamie’s parents are circumscribed by a mode of thinking according to which a woman
should subsume her interests to sustain her married life. Even a well-educated art
historian like Heidi in The Heidi Chronicles (1988), who makes it her mission to trace the
missing women artists, realises her true sense of liberation by adopting a child. The only
element of subversion seems to be the fact that she doesn’t see marriage as a necessary
means for attaining motherhood.

Wasserstein’s creativity lay in transforming the personal crises of these women
into a political statement. An American Daughter (1997) had for its concerns, the mid-life
crisis that plagues women, especially when it comes to a reassessment of social and political goals against a constantly changing set of values and traditions. Her work explores with a sense of wistfulness the impossibility of women to “have it all” all the time – within the confines of a sexist society and an ideology like feminism which changes its rules right in the middle of the game.

Anna Deavere Smith’s plays *Fires in the Mirror* (1993) and *Twilight: Los Angeles* (1993) are the narratives of the responses of a community to an event that had the effect of imploding the constituent structure of the society from within and laying bare the paradoxes lying at its core. The canvas moves to a macro perspective as Smith tries to capture at the essence of “identity in motion” and what it implies with reference to the larger idea of “American character”. The text of the play is sourced in the interviews conducted by Anna Deavere Smith over a period of time. Her plays were initially meant for the audience who were directly related to the social collisions from which she sourced her work. In some ways, she approached the dimensions of documentary theatre in her plays.

Feminist criticism in the seventies and eighties was caught in a conflict between aesthetics and ideology (Jill Dolan 94). The reason for this was the realisation that the experiences of women are bound to be different and most of the times fragmented due to ethnic and cultural factors. This meant that the idea of a “collective” just fell short of capturing the conflicting identity of the American woman. Accommodation of diversity meant that there was no single mode for treating feminism because the intersections between race, gender and ethnicity generated a plurality of experiences and perspectives.
This did have a bearing on the critical interest assigned to plays written by women American playwrights. For example, in a play like *The Heidi Chronicles* by Wendy Wasserstein, much of the criticism was focussed on the final image of Heidi holding an adopted baby girl. This was construed as a retreat to the patriarchal ideology which defined the roles of women in the context of their childbearing ability. Even the play *An American Daughter* was criticized for Judith’s efforts to bear a child through artificial means. In the play *Third*, Laurie’s friend discovers her sense of being through marriage.

Krolloke and Sorensen, in their essay “Three Waves of Feminism” situate the third wave of feminism in the “post colonial and the post socialist world order, in the context of information and neoliberal, global politics” (2). Such a sourcing marks the movement away from the ideas of universal womanhood, and focuses critical attention on the articulation of the manner in which women negotiate the complex intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class and age related concerns (17). This also implies that the idea of identifying with a group had limited tenability, which could partly explain why many feminist theatre groups could not survive for long. The fundamental characteristic of such a shift also engendered an acceptance of a chaotic world while simultaneously embracing ambiguity and the willingness to form new alliances (19). Janelle Reinelt describes such a condition as “post feminism”, a state in which though there is nothing to join and no clear “woman” to be, the concerns about equality, free expression, power, respect and sexual subjectivity are still present (20).

When women discovered their ability to relate across differences, feminism moved from theorizing differences to theorizing the spaces in-between the differences. Since the differences are engendered by social, cultural and historical factors, the process
of negotiating the differences across the various axes like gender and power and social structures assumes the pattern of relational positioning, which can also be described as “migratory feminism in the borderlands” (Friedman 68). While multicultural feminism clearly arose out of a need to theorize the “differences” among women, Susan Friedman postulates that the vital and real longings for connection between differences are equally important in an interactive understanding of gender, especially in relation to societal stratifications and multiple constituents of identity. She says: “the interplay of cultural markers of identity depends on an oscillation of sameness and difference that is historically embedded within the context of complex power relations” (76). Such a theorizing of what Susan Friedman Stanford would describe as “migratory feminism in the borderlands” is shared by Diane Glancy. She admits in an interview that feminism, as defined traditionally, can be a limiting term precisely because in the present context, the role of women is “too-conflicted, too ambivalent and too hard-core to look at” (Conversation 6). When placed against a socially hybridized context in which the characters are often entrapped in a collision between cultures, Glancy’s women are characterized by an inner search for meaning, especially from their relational perspectives on connections and differences. Glancy recognizes that there is a complex mixture of culture which only “makes us find our own ways to live”. There are many different borderlands, and even America, according to her is a borderland because “the melting pot, the oneness, the one nation under God never was and never will be” (Conversation 3). Therefore, the longing for connection can be as crucial as the perception of difference.

From this point of view, Glancy’s plays can be considered as “scripts of relational positionality”. They establish the perspective of a migratory borderland which enables the
conception of identity as a fluid site which can be understood differently depending on the vantage points of their formation and function. Glancy’s women operate from this migratory borderland. Their location as mediators is characterized by their ability to see beyond the binary categories of “seen” and “unseen”. While they address the multiple loyalties of a working woman, a faithful wife, a divorced spouse or a bereaved companion, they move between conflicting cultural heritages rather than claiming racial and ethnic roots. Through their cultural narratives, they are led towards possibilities for contact amidst new paths of connection and relatedness.

In *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen proposes a model for the classification of American Indian literature into “several interlocking categories” (4). The major divisions are the traditional literature and genre literature of the present. She further classifies traditional literature into ceremonial and popular varieties, depending on the context in which the literature is used. While discussing the genre literature of the present, she stresses that though the categorization can be done on the basis of the classic western categories such as poetry, fiction or drama, structural and thematic elements from the oral tradition often intrude into the structure of the works. Such an oral tradition is fundamentally defined by the virtue of its “continuous flux” which ensures that the oral tradition is not just a record of people’s culture, but a significant “creative source of collective and individual selves” (224).

Glancy conceives of the oral tradition as a fire, representing the spirit of the people. She describes it as an “invisible library” (*Claiming Breath* 103) which often ends up sourcing the cultural aspects of a person’s identity. However, the process of sourcing becomes a tensional affair, especially given the context in which Glancy situates her
works. Glancy’s characters often find themselves in a marginalised context, which is further exacerbated by the sociocultural collisions which engender ambiguities. Such a context demands for a fundamental shift in the manner in which the characters view their historical and cultural past. While certain aspects of the Native American storytelling method like the creation of a multi-layered perspective and the circularity of action are obvious in Glancy’s plays, it can also be sensed that the Native American oral discourse is often situated in a hybridized context, what she would describe as the “margin between native storytelling and western theater”. Regarding the stylistic aim and purpose of her work, she says:

The kind of work that most engages me is the margin between native storytelling and western theater. These are non-mixers; To get the circular and sometimes repetitive native storytelling onto a linear, usually point-driven western stage is what creative native work is about. (sic) (Writings 11)

Thus the presence of the oral tradition in Glancy’s plays can be discerned in her persistent efforts to locate a marginalised Native voice on the Western stage. Glancy says in Further(Farther):

Dramatic language is like electricity. Which is hard to explain. It accesses invisibility and all things going to it. A play is a small town. With an interstate bypassing it. Yet connected to the power plant by the river. A new oral tradition with breath that is the condition of performance. A planet of being. A location. A vectoring that is a conflation of crossroads in different perspectives. (sic) (200)
When she conceives of a play as a “vectoring”, the implication is that her plays engender a conflation of crossroads in different perspectives. Such a conflation is suggestive of the idea that the solution to the spiritual conflicts lies in the recognition of a multi-layered perspective, which emerges from the variety of marginalised voices which Glancy tries to integrate in her plays. Hence, her writing becomes an act of “wrioting” (*Claiming Breath* 9).

The women who people Diane Glancy’s plays move radically and sometimes arbitrarily between the various perspectives to reach the vantage position of healing and compassion, because therein lies the key to their survival. In her preface to *American Gypsy* Glancy states: “An American Gypsy is a Native American who knows migration and rootlessness” (44). The play, she continues to say, is about migration and finding roots after the migration is over. Such a pattern can be extended to all of her plays. Conflicts triggered by the sociocultural collisions are negotiated through a process of “re-visioning” and sometimes “re-positioning” of the “usable past” that has been handed down in the form of myths and memories.

Such “re-visioning” or “re-positioning” is usually contingent upon the potential for healing generated within the dimension of the play, a process which can be termed as “enucleation.” What Glancy says about the enucleatory aspect of poetry holds good for her drama as well. While her work comes from what is happening in her life, her ultimate aim in writing is to achieve what she would describe as that point of clarity characterized by the strangeness of the poet to the very world he heals and clarifies.

Further, Glancy traces her conception of performance to a childhood memory, when she had been denied the chance to perform. When such an aspect of
marginalization is impinged on the idea of performance, the word “performance” takes on a whole new implication. In fact, she equates writing with performance because it is a process oriented endeavour through which the audience feels the performance of the words onto the avenue of the written text. She says in “Bowling”:

I remember being denied performance. In grade school, I wanted to be in a play and was not chosen. But standing on the sidelines, watching others act, I began to feel the performance of the words, which for me, would make its way onto the avenue of written text…for me, the written word is the performance…Writing is a performance for me. (Writings 3-4)

Glancy has been more often acknowledged for her poetry and fiction, rather than for her contribution to the Native American theatre. In fact, much of the critical commentary on her work has been devoted to her novel Pushing the Bear (1996) which deals retrospectively with the mass migration of the Cherokees in 1839. However, in spite of receiving numerous awards, her anthologies of plays War Cries: Plays by Diane Glancy (1997) and American Gypsy: Six Native American Plays (2002) have received limited critical attention. Her crucial contribution to critical perspectives on American drama, which in turn inform her own dramatic work, has also received limited critical coverage.

However, this trend is slowly witnessing a change in recent times. Kimberley Blaeser, in her introduction to War Cries, identified the most significant aspect of Glancy’s plays – the understanding of literary arts as a healing force – an aspect that is very crucial to issues related to survival (vi). Birgit Dawes, in her essay, “Fox-trot with Me, Baby: Glancy’s Dramatic Work” provides essential perspectives on the four
cornerstones of Glancy’s dramatic theory.\(^5\) (Salt Companion 137) Christy Stanlake devotes a great deal of critical attention to the play *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer* in her study of the distinctive discourses of Native American philosophies which relate themselves to the theatre’s performative medium.\(^6\) While each section of the present study will adopt the perspective needed to further the arguments, the overall model of analysis will necessarily include critical aspects drawn from the discourses of the oral traditions which are fundamental to Native American literature.

For this study, the primary texts will include plays from the anthologies *War Cries, American Gypsy: Six Native American Plays* and *The Sum of Winter*. In addition to these, *Salvage*, an unpublished play will also be included. To inform the analysis, references will be made to the critical works of Gerald Vizenor whose theory of survivance finds echoes in Glancy’s own work. In addition to this, references will be made to Paula Gunn Allen’s views on the social and the spiritual systems of the Native American society. Susan Stanford’s perspectives on migratory feminism will provide a useful point of departure for studying the feminist perspective in Glancy’s plays. In addition to the above, Homi K. Bhabha’s views on the interstitial model of cultural negotiation provides interesting possibilities for the acts of empowerment, which are for the most part specific to the women characters of her plays.

In the second chapter of the study, titled “Echoing Voices and Stories” attempt will be made to analyse certain significant elements of Glancy’s dramatic discourse. Glancy’s literary productions across multiple genres have often been the result of a tensional negotiation of her “marginalised” location. In her works, she attempts to create a dramatic space for the emergence of various marginalised voices by consciously
confusing the boundaries between the past and the present. When the personal and the
generational are intertwined with the sociocultural collisions, interesting possibilities are
engendered for the fluid development of the narratives. In a seemingly post-modernist
discourse employed in her plays, memory acts as a controlling force. Further, the
integration of the trickster discourse also permits her to integrate the possibilities for
echoing various voices which cause the narratives to happen. Since her dramatic focus is
on the “intercalation”\(^7\) between various worlds, the trickster aspect of the discourse
permits her to freewheel between forms, genres and worlds using the aspect of fluidity
suggested by the trickster figure. This enables her to combine elements of different
genres into what she would describe as recognition of self in a “cross-genre writing of
democracy”\(^8\) \((Further\ 203-204)\).

It is possible to discern that Glancy’s use of imagery, while facilitating shifting
contexts and meanings, approximates to Gayathri Spivak’s concept of catachresis – a
tactical maneuver that involves wrenching particular images and concepts out of their
place within a particular narrative and using them to open up new areas of meaning.
Further, the tensional aspect is also typified by the patterns of contradiction and irony that
run through the dramatic discourse, which enable the dramatist to graduate to a theatre
based on negotiating an uncontainable sense of identity.\(^9\)

The third chapter, titled ‘Patterns of Spiritual Negotiation’ will attempt to trace
the patterns of survival in Glancy’s plays. The metaphor that can sum up the whole
process of spiritual negotiation in Glancy’s plays is that of the Sweat Lodge Ceremony,
which has for its ultimate aim, the healing of the individual through purification.
However, political overtones often emerge in such processes, especially when the
characters are located in a liminal position between contact cultures and religions. In this context, Vizenor’s theory of the mythic, material and the visionary motion\textsuperscript{10}, the notion of personal and visionary sovereignty\textsuperscript{11}, and the idea of transmotion\textsuperscript{12} become useful aspects to trace the conversion of the personal to the spiritual.

The enactment of a Native American play itself can be considered to be a ceremony, which has for its purpose, an engendering of healing, typified by the tensional spiritual negotiations of her characters. Such negotiations in Glancy’s plays can be studied with reference to the patterns of vision quest and the patterns of ceremony as obvious in the recontextualised myths, rituals and artifacts. The pattern of the ceremonial spiritual negotiation also happens in the mediational mode, especially when the characters position themselves as participants of both Native American as well as Christian traditions, a position shared by the dramatist herself.

The fourth section of the study titled “From the Personal to the Spiritual – The Empowered Women” will attempt to examine the location of Glancy’s women characters who often emerge empowered albeit their marginalised sociocultural profile. This is essentially typified in the crucial roles assigned to them by the playwright – they function as healers, visionaries, and creators of meaning.

Glancy’s plays reveal that the sociocultural profiles of her women have transformed over a period of time. When such a location is examined against the culturally assigned positions of Native American women before colonization, it is possible to see that Glancy’s feminism is characterized by an inner quest for meaning. She uses the word “she-donism” – the pursuit of she-pleasure – to describe such a process. The sociocultural and political undercurrent involved in locating her women
characters as mediators of intense religious experiences necessarily includes a mode of thought which looks for points of interconnectedness between cultures and events rather than theorizing the differences engendered by the marginalised location of her characters. As a result, the processes of mediation are tensional and problematic, especially when her women characters are placed in a complex social matrix in which gender and race operate in tandem with other constituents of a fragmented sense of identity. As a result, the act of connecting the personal to the spiritual is subverted at a very fundamental level, signifying that “newness” is an insurgent act of cultural transition.

This implies that the process of empowering women necessarily involves a deconstruction of the patriarchal structures. However, Glancy goes a step further and includes access to spirituality as a crucial marker for the empowerment of her women. This can be clearly discerned by her attempts to contextually recast traditional myths, images and legends, the animal transformations permitted to them and the idea of a “reinvented oral tradition”, to which most of her women characters subscribe. From this, it can be concluded that the journey towards “ani-yun-wiyu”\textsuperscript{13} is an intense spiritual quest, defined by the locational space of her characters.

In the concluding chapter of the study, titled “The Comparisons and Controversies” attempt will be made to explore certain critical and controversial aspects of Glancy’s work with reference to other American women playwrights and her status as a Native American Woman playwright. Identification with the Native American heritage might be viewed as an unsubstantiated claim especially with reference to her literary works. Her dramatic narratives often seem to be assuming a locational characteristic especially when she identifies her characters as belonging to a particular tribe. But the
critical positioning in her plays moves away from “tribal centered” criticism and explores the elasticity of terms like borders and culture. In fact, in the introduction to The Women Who Loved House Trailers, she talks about the interlocking of cultures being an aspect of the new wave oral tradition that she is trying to create (20).

An aspect of her work that has attracted criticism is her missionary zeal and recourse to the Christian model of conversion and assimilation. When we examine the syncretic nature of Glancy’s discourse and the transcultural model of appropriation, it becomes clear that Glancy’s transreligious position is reflected in the specific engagement with cultural differences and points of interconnectedness.

Another controversial aspect of Glancy plays is the perpetual reference to broken or dysfunctional families and relationships. Such a theme perpetuates the broken nature of Native American consciousness at a larger level. While the reservation life had resulted in various issues like alcoholism and breakdown of social institutions, the restrained access to language and culture ensured that Native Americans had limited connection to their spiritual systems of thought. However, it is to be noted that the act of brokenness in Glancy’s plays functions only to mirror the systematic denigration of the Native American self. That is why in most of the plays, Glancy reports or hints at the causes for the dysfunction, rather than delineate them in their entirety. Her mission statement seems to be the recovery of the spiritual aspect of one’s personality amidst the broken fragments of Native American consciousness. The act of brokenness, both at the structural and the thematic level enables the dramatist to embed messages of hope and survival within the disrupted discourse of the plays.
To further explore Glancy’s position with reference to the critical terms of the study, attempt will be made to compare and contrast the operation of culture, conflict and social fabric in the plays of Marsha Norman (1947-), Wendy Wasserstein (1950-2006) and Anna Deavere Smith (1950-). The justification for the comparison arises from the fact that issues related to marginalised identity are central the work of these women playwrights as well. Marsha Norman is an White American woman playwright, Anna Deavere Smith is a Black American Woman playwright and Wendy Wasserstein was a Jewish American woman playwright. The point of unity between these playwrights arises from the fact that they conceived of their drama as a platform for examining politics involved in the processes related to survival in the context of the tensional sociocultural location of their women characters. Diane Glancy’s plays capture the essential ambivalence arising out of racial, gender, social and cultural conflict. Naturally, the developing identity that she chronicles is of the ‘amorphous variety’ constantly changing directions and patterns in line with the changing social matrix.

An outcome of such a process of constant quarrel with one’s self against a fragmented sociocultural context is the emergence of a multiplicity of voices emerge as a consequence of such an artistic engagement. This provides for a non-linear sense of action, blurring between worlds, and forms, and the operation of dynamic metaphors and images within the structural patterns of the play, an aspect that will be explored in the next chapter.

The delimitations to this study include the following two aspects. Firstly, primary texts for analysis have been considered as texts in print and not as drama in performance. While such an approach can be substantiated by the equating the act of writing itself to a
performance, it is also to be noted that in a removed context, the access to the performances of these plays has been limited. Secondly, though Diane Glancy has inherited multiple identities, cultures and religions, the critical thrust in this study has been on the Native American aspect of her profile as echoed in a translocated context. Further scope for research arises precisely in the play of identities, cultures and religions as perceived not only in Glancy’s dramatic works, but also her fiction, poetry and essays.

The references to the following plays will be made from the anthology *War Cries* – *Weebjob, Stick Horse, Bull Star, Halfact, Segwohi, The Truth Teller, Mother of Mosquitos, The Best Fancy Dancer the Pushmataha Pow Wow’s Ever Seen* and *One Horse*. The references to the following plays will be made from the anthology *American Gypsy: Six Native American Plays – The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for Deer Dance, The Women Who Loved House Trailers, American Gypsy, Jump Kiss, The Lesser Wars, The Toad (Another Name for the Moon) Should Have a Bite* and *Further (Farther) : Creating Dialogue to Talk About Native American Plays*. The plays *The Collector of a Three-Cornered Stamp* and *The Sum of Winter* are from the anthology *The Sum of Winter*. Similarly, Wasserstein’s *Uncommon Women and Others* and *Isn’t It Romantic* is a part of the anthology *The Heidi Chronicles and Other Plays*. Hence, the pagination for quotations from these plays will refer to the pages in the anthologies, as available with me.

This study also includes an appendix of an email interview conducted with Diane Glancy. The seventh edition of the MLA Handbook has been followed for the references and the bibliography.
Notes

1. Thrice the Five Civilized Tribes Playwright Laureate in 1984-86, 1988-90 and 1994-96; Aspen Theater Chamberlain Prize in 1988; the Oklahoma Theater Association Award in 1987; the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers Playwriting Award in 1997; the Borderlands Theater Play Festival Award in 1990.

2. She was the first Native American student to graduate from the Oklahoma College for Women. She also took graduate classes in Acting at Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh.

3. In *Claiming Breath*, Glancy combines two aspects of the term ‘enucleation’ and theorizes poetry as an agent of clarification and healing (74-75). Such an idea of enucleation can be extended to her plays as well.

4. Blaesar feels that each of the plays in the collection *War Cries* contains a spark of healing, an aide to survival.

5. Dawes identifies the four cornerstones as the pivotal power of storytelling, a processual aesthetics which is inseparable from an ethics of reception, the integration of cultural and political differences, and the confluence of diverse spiritual traditions.

6. In her study *Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective*, Stanlake demonstrates the working of platiality, storytelling, tribalography and survivance with reference to dramaturgy.

7. The intercalated worlds are – the physical world, the dream world, the spirit beings, the ancestors, and the imaginative experience which is a strip of all between.
Such a conception of the dramatic world is clearly consistent with the idea of the migratory feminism in the borderlands proposed by Susan Friedman.

8. In Further (Farther): Creating Dialogue, while exploring the literary theory for Native American plays, Glancy uses the phrase “cross-genre writing of democracy” to explicate the importance of exchanging, relating and interacting with the various voices of a longer story. This implies that the boundaries of the dramaturgical tools can be extended and sometimes even blurred to accommodate such voices

9. For example, her first published play Weebjob (1997) has a clear conflict which directs the course of action in the play. However, in The Toad Should Have a Bite (2000), the focus is more on the question of representing an uncontainable sense of identity in terms of myths and cultural practices.

10. Christy Stanlake in Native American Drama, offers a comprehensive interpretation of Vizenor’s theory of mythic, material and visionary motion. Mythic motion relies on the trickster figure to illustrate that the Native American acts of deconstruction were sourced in the pre-existing Native practices. Material motion refers to patterns of resistance against stereotyping through the creation of art and identities that defy categorization. Visionary Motion refers to the person’s ability to apply the concept of transmotion to himself in order to attain a critical positioning that defies limitations (170).

11. In Vizenor’s conception, personal sovereignty includes the concept of national sovereignty to address the individual’s realization and the will to self-governance, opportunity to establish self-representation, and the choice to select or reflect elements of Native traditions within the ever-changing context of one’s personal life. The
third aspect of personal sovereignty can be easily correlated to Glancy’s plays, especially from the spiritual point of view. Visionary sovereignty on the other hand, makes it possible for the creation of an in-between world from which characters are able to access both the material and the spiritual aspects of their life.

12. Vizenor defines Native transmotion as an original natural union in the stories of emergence and migration that relate humans to an environment and to the spiritual and political significance of animals and other creations. (*Fugitive Poses* 183) When applied to Glancy’s plays, the aspect of transmotion can be discerned in the fluidity that operates between the material and non-material worlds and the animal transformations permitted to certain characters.

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