Chapter 4

From the Personal to the Spiritual – The Empowered Women

Locating women at the centre of intense spiritual experiences is not an isolated feminist endeavour in Glancy’s plays, but an effort that is intertwined with her historical and sociocultural location. Most of her women play the crucial role of mediators as far as creating a conflation of perspectives is concerned. For example, though *Stick Horse* appears to be a play that primarily deals with the attempted healing of Eli’s alcoholism, it is difficult to ignore the active presence of Quannah and Virgene, the two Native American women, who contribute to the ceremony in a distinctive manner. Similarly, though *Weebjob* is primarily about Weebjob’s spiritual crisis, we find that the action in the play is accentuated by the attempts of the women of his house to discover their identity through exercising their choices – Sweet Grass wants to start weaving and Sweet Potato wants to marry Pick Up, a man old enough to be her father.

Such mediations appear to be modelled on the negotiation of intersubjective cultural values as described by Homi K Bhabha and augmented by Susan Stanford Friedman. Bhabha assigns crucial significance to the “in-between” spaces for examining the strategies of selfhood. In his conception, these “in-between” spaces are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. With reference to Glancy’s plays, the in-between
spaces are characterized by the liminal location of the characters, particularly the women characters, who have had a significant exposure to a sociocultural system which assigns a secondary status to their womanhood. Bhabha further says, “It is in the emergence of these interstices – the overlap and the displacement of the domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest and cultural value are negotiated” (2). Further theorizing the “in-between space”, Bhabha argues that the borderline work of culture demands an encounter with a ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of the past and the present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. (10) This aspect of the interstitial perspective is also obvious in the sociocultural interstices which are represented in Glancy’s plays as sites for religious and cultural revisioning. “Newness” as cultural translation can be perceived in the revisioning of sociocultural encounters which aid the characters in negotiating their marginalised status from a translocated perspective.

Further, when Bhabha describes the social articulation of difference as a “complex, on-going negotiation” (2) he is in fact alluding to the performative aspect of such articulations which are shaped by a dialogic mediation which is characteristic of any attempt to theorize the “in-between” spaces. Hence, Bhabha makes a valid case for an interactive model of understanding gender based issues from a relational point of view. Such a relational perspective will take into consideration the contradictory aspects of the sociocultural context and the multiple constituents of identity.

As it appears, Bhabha’s model of interstitial negotiation appears to be useful because it enables the creation of a perspective that looks beyond fixed categories and the binaries, and hence aids the process of creating meaning from the “in-between” places.
An obvious implication of such a model is that culture becomes a hybrid and a political concept, often shaped and informed by the choices exercised by a character located within a marginalised terrain, what Bhabha would describe as “interstices”. In Glancy’s plays, such interstices often operate in the disconnect perceived between the culturally conditioned patterns of thought and the realities of life with which they appear to be inconsistent.

In Glancy’s plays, interstitial negotiation is sourced not only in the clash between cultures, but also in the conflation of perspectives that emerge as a result of such sociocultural encounters. Further, since national culture is a hybrid concept in the postcolonial discourse, the colonizer’s culture exerts an ambiguous influence upon the narratives of the colonized. For example, Weebjob integrates the complications arising out of colonial subjugation, which is obvious in his misrepresentation of the forms of social system. He says, “In the old days the father was the leader of the family. He was the thinker, the medicine man, the holy man, the elder. He was respected. No decisions were made until HE was asked, He had an HONORABLE place” (62). The capitalization of ‘HE’ and ‘HONORABLE’ is indeed significant because what Weebjob states about his society is an idea enforced by the colonial forms of social organization. The notion of a patriarchal social system is in clear opposition to what Paula Gunn Allen describes as a “woman-centered social system” (2) while discussing the traditional lifestyles of the Native American people. It is clear that the concept of male superiority has been planted through Weebjob’s encounters with Christianity in the reservation schools.

However, in Glancy’s plays, the influence of Christianity is rarely seen as a totally oppressive construct. In fact, the liminal space between Native American religions
and Christianity is open to negotiation and creation of meaning. Against such a context, the process of moving from the specific to the general, or the material to the metaphoric, does not always approximate to a transition or transcendence. To put it in Glancy’s terms, such a process is engendered by a “conflation of crossroads in different perspectives”, which would prevent identities from settling into fixed categories. For the creation of a conflation of crossroads of perspectives, Glancy sources her intense spiritual experiences in the interstices between the culturally conditioned patterns of thought and the sociocultural realities. It emerges that women are often located at the centre of such experiences.

As has been stated before, there is a sociocultural and political undercurrent involved in locating women as the mediators of such intense experiences. While multicultural feminism\(^1\) clearly arose out of a need to theorize the ‘differences’ among women, Susan Friedman postulates that the vital and real longings for connection in 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”(6). When placed against a marginalised context, Glancy’s women are characterized by an inner search for meaning, especially from their relational perspectives.
on connections and differences. 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 is as crucial as the perception of difference. From this point of view, Glancy’s plays can be considered as “scripts of relational positionality” (Friedman 48) which establish the perspective of a migratory borderland.2

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. While functioning in the marginal space between the cultural zones, they are led to possibilities for contact, discovering new paths of connection and relatedness through their cultural narratives. To conceptualize such movements, it is imperative to consider the traditional roles of Native American women and how they have transformed over a period of time. Paula Gunn Allen in the introduction to The Sacred Hoop discusses seven important features of the traditional Native American society, out of which three deal exclusively with the gynocratic nature of the tribal societies.

1. Traditional tribal lifestyles are more often gynocratic than not, and they are not patriarchal.

2. The physical and cultural genocide of American Indian tribes is and was mostly about patriarchal fear of gynocracy.
3. Western studies of American Indian tribal systems are erroneous at base because they view tribalism from the cultural bias of patriarchy and thus either discount, degrade or conceal gynocratic features or recontextualize those features so that they will appear patriarchal (2-3).

While the Native American societies were matrilineal to begin with, the social system was focused on social responsibility rather than the privileges accorded by gender, status or power. Patrice E.M Holrah also voices a similar idea when she says that in such societies, men and women worked in a complementary manner which allowed for many variations in roles. She says, “Although gender complementarity is just one aspect to consider when examining literary Native characters, it provides a perspective in which to understand how these female characters can be powerful, autonomous, and valued for their contributions to the tribal community” (172). Gunn Allen also describes the women in such societies as ‘self-defining, assertive, decisive’ women (2). In such societies, women were considered to be the bearers of culture. This is obvious in the creation myths and the storytelling traditions where they have often assumed the roles of “repositories and transmitters of culture” (Laura Coltelli 5). Paula Gunn Allen points out that in many tribal systems, the oral tradition in its ceremonial and ritual aspects rests on female power. As story tellers, they could often integrate the tangible and the spiritual world. This implies that they occupied a significant position within the social matrix. Therefore, the creation of a women-focused world-view was one of the outcomes of the gynocratic organization of the society. This world-view is necessarily spirit-centered and relies on the ritual aspect of life.
Commenting on the process of systematic colonization, Paula Gunn Allen says that many Native American tribes have seen a progressive shift from gynocentric, egalitarian, ritual-based societies to secularized structures closely imitative of the European patriarchal model. Therefore, the physical and the cultural genocide of American Indian tribes had its source in the patriarchal fear of gynocracy.

In Glancy’s plays the patriarchal fear of gynocracy defines the woman in terms of her relationship with a man and her domestic responsibilities which serve to inhibit any kind of attempts at self-definition. For example, Weebjob’s consciousness has been irretrievably altered by his reservation school experiences. As a result, he can perceive neither his wife nor his daughter as “thinking women”. The following conversation between Weebjob and Sweet Grass illustrates this aspect.

WEEBJOB. You never used to contradict me, Sweet Grass.

SWEET GRASS. Because I express my opinion, you call it a contradiction? Haven’t I always been free to say what I think?

WEEBJOB. Yes, because what you’ve said always agreed with what I thought you should say.

SWEET GRASS. But if I should say something that didn’t agree with what you think I should say, then I should keep quiet? (69)

Similarly, in Segwohi, Sereh’s inability to have a man in her life is at the root of the diminished status assigned to her by her brother. In his opinion, the lack of a steady relationship makes Sereh ineligible for the role of an advisor. The following exchange between them reveals this aspect of role subjugation.
SEGWOHI. Where else do you have to go, old woman? Your husband left you long ago. You do nothing but make warped cellars at your potter’s wheel.

SEREH. You’ve had someone leave you too. Don’t forget I cook for you. Don’t think I couldn’t cook for someone else. Do you know how many old men would have me?

SEGWOHI. I checked last week and there were two. One is a woman beater, and the other just died (214).

In *Bull Star* while the Old Chief justifies his act of disinheriting his daughter with the following statement, “Women only want what they can get. A man finally has to keep something for himself”; his son-in law is convinced that just like her mother, Cree is still looking for an “egg man” (157). In *American Gypsy*, Tito’s resistance to Peri accessing his mother’s recipes arises partly from his insecurity. Such an act would imply economic independence for Peri, something that Titomo is not comfortable with, because he has limited her role and her space to the kitchen, as revealed in the following exchange: (52)

PERI. …I’ve been wanting to read your mother’s recipes, Tito. I could open those boxes in the shed.

TITOMO. Why don’t you cook?

PERI. I’ve already fed your friends. Now they’re at the reservoir or the Anadarko Pow Wow. Besides, I work at Neville’s café tomorrow.

REEP. Yahoo! Fritters and homemade pies.

PERI. I’ve thought about starting my own café – I even thought of a delivery service.
Against such a context, we see that while Glancy’s women characters attempt to
fulfil their primary responsibilities of a housekeeper, childbearer or nurturer, they do not
enjoy unquestioned power or status. They often negotiate questions of identity within the
frames of a society based on privileges and conformity. We see them constantly trying to
receive, interpret and reinterpret the rationale behind the ritual and the meaning behind
the story. In the process, they revert to their roles of healers, dreamers and shamans. For
example in *The Women who Loved House Trailers*, the narratives of Berta, Oscar and
Jelly are more than stories of their problems and limitations. The very process of telling
the story is assigned ritual significance with the healing aspect embedded in it. And while
narrating stories from their Native American repertoire as well as similar instances in the
Australian culture, they attempt to show that the concept of “interlocking cultures” finds
a chord in the versions of the stories, which ironically function as stories by themselves.
This is intrinsically linked to sharing in a “worldwide culture”, the final point in Allen’s
discussion on the unique aspect of Native American society. Such an aspect of diversity
and sharing helps Glancy to negotiate and look beyond the usual definitions of feminism
which she feels are very limiting. She attempts to look at her women from a very
personalized stance, something which she refers to as “she-donism”.

The first reference to the term appears in *Claiming Breath*, where in an essay
“Shedonism”, she says that a woman is defined by her relationship to herself as opposed
to the idea of defining a woman with reference to a man. In the essay titled
‘Fragments/Shards’ she narrates her quest for finding her individual voice after her
divorce using the pattern of a journey towards “ani-yun-wiyu”, a Cherokee term for the
journey towards ‘real people’. Her purpose was to discover the truth of her voice, in
relation to various other voices that periodically intruded during the course of her life
experiences. This, according to her, becomes the source of the pleasure of being a
woman. If we consider the literal break up of the words, it would be tempting to consider
she-donism as a movement in opposition to he-donism, and straitjacket the feminism of
Glancy’s plays as that of gender based oppositions. Moreover, there is also the pursuit of
pleasure aspect which is assigned to hedonism. However, it is important to delineate that
the word ‘she’ is justified by the significant presence of her women characters who are
distinguished by their urge to discover their voice. They parallel the playwright’s
personal journey by trying to search for answers in the interstices between sociocultural
encounters, and religious affiliations. The fissures and contradictions of everyday life
push the women into the realm of the spiritual, just like how divorce pushed Glancy into
a spiritual reassessment of her own location. From her own marginal position Glancy
conjures a way in which she can create points of contact between the Native religious
constructs and the acquired/enforced religions through transformations of everyday life
experiences. This is the path that most of her women characters adopt, while moving
towards a location of survivance.

During the course of such a movement, Glancy’s women look at everyday life
experiences from a spiritual perspective. While they function essentially as mediators, it
can be seen that such a role has been appropriated from the traditional healer archetype or
the ‘shaman’. In a translocated perspective, they function as healers mostly by aiding the
process of looking at the ‘familiar’ from a new perspective. Glancy’s feminism treads the
spiritual path - women initialize, catalyse or aid the process of mediating between the
conflicting demands in a translocated context. The pursuit of she-pleasure is intricately linked to the connections engendered between the personal and the spiritual. In Glancy’s plays, the converse also holds good. It is through the recourse to the spiritual that women gain a better understanding of their roles in a translocated context and gain a justification for survival. The element of she-donism is obvious in the attempts of the women to define themselves beyond the confines of the relationship with a man. Sometimes, the element of she-donism is also obvious in the strategy behind the choice which is symptomatic of the attempt to move beyond the confines of a relationship.

We can examine the roles of women in Glancy’s plays with reference to the interstitial location in which they are placed, and the processes of negotiation, which are often problematic and tensional, especially with reference to issues of faith and womanhood. The common path that informs their journey towards such a location is the “spiritual understanding of womanhood as an expression of spirit” (Gunn Allen 208). Therefore, instead of being relegated to the status of helpless victims, Glancy’s heroines emerge as empowered women, the source of empowerment being the recognition of the “newness” as an insurgent act of cultural translation (Bhabha 10).  

Bhabha’s concept of the interstitial perspective necessitates the move away from “class” and “gender” as primary conceptual and organizational categories, so that due awareness is devoted to issues like race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale and sexual orientation which function as the constituents of identity. Friedman also supports such an idea when she says that any given identity can be read as the place where different axes such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, class and sexuality
interact (Friedman 109). She posits that no one axis exists in pure form, but each is mediated through the others in the form of historically specific embodiments.

In Glancy’s plays, it is often tempting to assume that gender and race are the main constituents of the interstitial perspective, especially when it has already been established that women are located in the midst of significant experiences. However, Glancy locates her women characters in a complex matrix where two or more of the above axes mediate through various sociocultural processes. In achieving such a mediatory framework, Glancy opens the path for a conflation of perspectives, from where “empowerment” becomes an attainable goal.

For example, when considering the characters of Sweet Grass and Sweet Potato, the interstitial perspective would integrate mediation between race, gender and religion. The diminished status that Weebjob assigns to the women of his household has its origin in his reservation school experiences and his encounters with Christianity. So, when Sweet Potato announces her decision to marry Pick-Up or Sweet Grass decides to take a break from her husband, his initial reaction is that of resistance. The power play arises clearly because Weebjob is unwilling to transfer any decision making authority to the women of his house, a trait that he shares with Segwohi. This is in contradiction to the position of respect and authority assigned to women in traditional Native American communities. So the aspects of gender and race operate within the construct of religious translocation which ensures that Sweet Grass and Sweet Potato are consigned to a marginalised status.

Similarly in Segwohi, Sereh is marginalised by her brother due to the lack of a stable relationship in her life. However, in her case, the interstitial perspective is further
defined by the mediation between gender and ethnicity. In fact, one of the major contention that Segwohi has against Sereh is that she has commercialized the sacred processes of art for economic reasons, failing to recognize that Sereh is in fact doubling up as the provider for the household through her income. While at one level, this can be indicative of a changed role orientation in the Native American community, Glancy also makes it amply clear in her plays that terms like “community” and “family” undergo an upheaval in the context of the reservation life that most of the Native Americans were forced to lead. This leads to a fundamental dissociation in the dynamics of family interaction, as seen in *Salvage*. Wolfert’s resistance to Memela’s Christian adages is definitely not prompted out of a lesser conception of women. In fact, his conversations with his dead wife Phoebe reveal the extent to which he is willing to reassign the traditional role of a woman as the guide for the family. What he resists in Memela’s personality is the desire to conceive of her life on purely socio-economic terms, something that would necessitate a split from her husband. As the play reveals, Memela’s marginalization has little to do with her location as a woman. It has more to do with her location as the wife of the man who killed another man’s wife. So gender functions as an axis of the interstitial perspective with reference to the roles played by women. Memela is positioned between her Native American heritage and the encounters with the contact culture are exemplified in her desire for independence rather than responsibility.

In *Halfact* and *The Lesser Wars*, marginalization has an aspect of sexual suppression. In *Halfact*, the Coyote Girl is marginalised due to the supposed encounters with contact culture which have stripped the “sacred” from the “sexual”, thereby altering the very nature of the institutional location of women. In a direct act of subversion,
though the Coyote Girl fills the shoes of her mother by baking bread at the hot oven, accepting such a responsibility also implies the implied sexual harassment at the hands of her brother and her father. From the interstitial perspective, sexuality functions in a subversive context from where the Coyote Girl emerges as a doubly marginalised individual after due mediation between gender and the processes engendered through the “supposed” encounters with the contact culture.

In *The Lesser Wars*, sexuality becomes one of the major axis of the interstitial perspective, with the changed perspectives on gender roles becoming a major point of mediation. Against a backdrop of the encounters with the received culture, narrated in the form of Columbus’s diaries of his voyage to America, and Tecoyo’s experiences with her former husband, Tecoyo realizes that she has been marginalised by the virtue of her gender. Sexuality is presented in a subversive context, especially through the inclusion of hysterectomy as a procedure for transcending a personalized sense of identity.

Tracing the operation of such interstices implies that the question of identity is intrinsically linked to locating the character spatially. An outcome of such an exercise is that the geopolitical space of the character “inflects” their perception of concepts such as self, community and family. For example, Memela in *Salvage* is influenced by the limits of the reservation life. The women in *The Women Who Loved House Trailers*, are fundamentally defined by their inability to envision ‘home’ as a solid construct. Peri in *American Gypsy* is defined in terms of migrating from the location of a wife defined in terms of her domestic responsibilities to a bereaved woman who wants to make the transition into an empowered individual. In other words, the self is located in the context of the intercultural encounters which bring to relief, the difference which operates
between the interstices and the attempts to locate points of connection between those differences encountered. In such narrative strategies, the motivation for empowerment lies in the encounter of the self in an intercultural context.

While discussing the necessity of looking beyond differences as far as feminist studies are concerned, Friedman makes the point that theories of power, empowerment, identity and subjectivity need to spotlight the space of relational interaction as much as they examine the space of difference (104). While empowering her women characters, Glancy looks beyond differences to engender points of connection. It would be interesting to consider that, in the absence of the relational aspect of interaction, Glancy’s women would emerge as victims rather than empowered individuals. It is precisely through their ability to make the connections across the differences which they perceive in the cultural, social, personal and spiritual aspects of their life that they emerge as empowered individuals.

For the purpose of the analysis, it would be useful to examine the process of empowerment through the deconstruction of the patriarchally oriented hierarchical structures. This will take into account the interstitial perspectives, which act as the source of sociocultural encounters which in turn push the women into considering “newness” as an insurgent act of cultural translation. In Glancy’s plays, patriarchy-oriented hierarchical structures can be observed with reference to two aspects. First is the appropriation of the decision-making authority whereby women are relegated to marginalised roles within the matrix of the family. Second is the denial of access to spirituality, because of which, women strive to make connections between the personal and the spiritual. In most of the cases, such a process is subverted at a very basic level.
One of the effects of colonial subjugation has been to suppress the voice of the woman, so that the historical perspective which emerged was often a one-sided story. The suppression of the voice of the woman essentially implied the appropriation of the decision-making authority. The quintessential Native American woman, in the tradition of the Grandmother Spider was considered a wise entity and was deemed to be the source of the creation itself. Translated into social terms, it implies that the woman occupied a crucial position in the family dynamics. Glancy’s women try to claim this position by restructuring their relationships so that their voices emerge empowered. It can be seen that such acts are intrinsically involved with the larger vision of their identity in a fragmented context.

At the beginning of *Weebjob*, Sweet Potato is described as having a mind of her own. Further, it is said that she is unhappy with her life specifically because she does not know where she belongs. Her act of hitch-hiking the interstate to Gallup can be read as an attempt to find a sense of belonging and meaning in a paradigm different from the one in which Weebjob exercises his parental control. This is typified in the conversations between the father and the daughter, which are laced with sarcasm. While the father describes his daughter as “stubborn” and “recalcitrant” (21), the daughter is convinced that her father has not understood a word in the Bible (20). Further, her insistence on being addressed as Suzanne Long Chalk and not as Sweet Potato, is also representative of an attempt to forge a sense of identity that would deny the suppressive presence of her father. It can also be read as an act signifying her willingness to embrace a Christian identity instead of her Native identity.
It can be seen that her act of circumventing her father while making a life decision is imbued with sociocultural implications. First of all, the act itself enables her to participate in the decision-making process. Secondly, by rebelling against her father and not including him within the perspective of her decision making, she is actually resisting the colonially transmitted patriarchal superiority. Thirdly, her act of getting married is intimately tied up with her “vision-quest” towards Gallup, a place to which she often hitchhikes in search of her true self, only to be constantly reminded about her marginalised status as a woman. Though her marriage to Pick Up would be a life of “unending subjection” (48), the promise of a chance to be on her own and do as she wants is something that she finds it hard to resist. Therefore, she restructures her relationship with her father and with Pick-Up in such a manner that she emerges as the decision maker. For a start, she chooses the man she wants to marry and then proceeds to have the wedding in the exact place that she wanted. Since the church has always had a stifling presence in her life, she chooses her father’s squash patch as the venue for the wedding. And in due deference to her wishes, she is addressed as Suzanne Long Chalk during the ceremony.

Glancy captures an interesting dialectic between the younger woman Sweet Potato and the older woman Sweet Grass. While Sweet Grass has just started understanding herself as an individual, she also recognizes the connection that she shares with her husband, even though he often falls short of the man he wants to be (58). While Sweet Potato takes recourse to resistance and denial, Sweet Grass resorts to temporary separation and reunion. Her letters to her family members chronicle the days she spends away from Weebjob. However, she chooses not to communicate with her husband. Also
of significance is the sequence in which she recollects her life with Weebjob. She says, “I wanted to get back to my loom behind the house. I even missed Mighty Warrior sleeping under my feet while I weave. I even missed you too, Weebjob” (54).

Weaving is indeed her resolution (45) because she remembers her loom ahead of her husband. The separation from Weebjob is a prelude to the act of taking over the decision making authority within the context of the family. This is obvious in the contrasting opening and the closing scenes of the play. When the play opens, the voice of Sweet Grass is almost absent. Towards the end of the scene, Weebjob is surprised to know that his wife is writing to everyone except to him. For a woman who would hardly look at Weebjob, or speak anything to him, the sudden expression of voice becomes possible through writing letters. And when she appears in the play, we don’t see the demure and the silent woman whom Weebjob had picked up from the female seminary. In her place, we find the empowered Native American woman, who deftly negotiates a truce between the warring father and daughter and engenders a process of healing between the father and his children. In an act symbolic of restructured relationships, she takes over the arrangement of the wedding on the squash patch and in fact, directs Weebjob during the course of the ceremony. This indicates that she manages to extend her boundaries beyond the kitchen to a world in which she can actually play a significant role in the family dynamics.

Gertrude in *The Best Fancy Dancer* combines the best of both the colonial culture and her Native American religion while restructuring the essential relationship between a man and a woman. While doing so, she gives her own voice to her story by telling it in her own way. For example, she can hear the spirits not just in the woods but also in K-
mart (295). The voices that she hears on her porch are company to her, probably more than her husband who while alive, preferred to spend his time fishing with his neighbour, Henry. By moving away from the traditionalist approach, which considers the entity to be at the centre of the universe, Gertrude has attuned herself to a spiritual world where Christianity can co-exist with her traditional culture precisely because of her ability to sensitize herself to the world around her.

Another powerful, yet a silent voice is that of Cree’s mother in *The Bull Star*, who seems to be speaking from beyond the grave. The Old Chief says about his wife, “Listen, I could have been a chief. My wife stood outside the election booth and told everyone what a rotten ass I was. I lost” (180). However, based on Cree’s recollections, it is made amply evident that her mother had left her husband more out of dissatisfaction. When Jack confesses his rodeo passion to Cree, she says, “He was always gone. Moving on to one place or another. He’d write sometimes and try to get my mother to follow him, but she wouldn’t. We stayed on the old place until she got tired of waiting” (156). It is significant to note that neither Cree nor her mother were a part of their husband’s dreams. Just as how Cree’s mother was not a part of her father’s dream of becoming the Chief, Cree could never be a part of Jack’s rodeo dream. This is a far cry from gender complementarity, which was a salient aspect of the Native American societies. In fact, it can also be construed that becoming a Chief or excelling at the rodeo act is an aspect of the quintessential American dream, which laid emphasis on individual achievement rather than familial harmony. Cree’s mother emerges as the silent voice that empowers her daughter with the knowledge that it is possible to actually let go of Jack. In fact, she makes a great leap in her conception of her marginalised status when she tells Jack
towards the conclusion of the play, “Go on. They’re waiting for you. You can ride the bulls in the rodeo and stay on or fall off. I don’t care. Do what you want” (187).

Sereh in Segwohi restructures her relationship with the two significant men in her life – her elder brother Segwohi and her nephew Peyto – by overthrowing two aspects of patriarchal culture. While Segwohi is preoccupied with his son’s inability to rise to the position of a Medicine Man, it is Sereh who puts the food on the table, and thereby gains a sense of self worth. Further, she appropriates the role of Medicine Woman in such a manner that in a situation of crisis, she becomes the mediator for peace and healing.

Segwohi concludes that his son would never be able to know the Great Spirit’s voice because he is twice divorced and had been to jail on drug possession. Hence, he could never be the Holy Man. He finds it hard to recognize that the source of Peyto’s problems lies in the fact that the Indian way of life does not exist for him. On the other hand, Sereh recognizes that socio-economic problems of Peyto have their source in the cultural ambivalence he experiences in the face of intercultural encounters. She is able to empathise with him when he says, “We’re here to make our own way on this open prairie – we’re supposed to stand while being pulled one way and then another – the job, the white world, the Indian’s” (219).

In the introduction to the play, it is stated that Sereh has lived under her brother’s shadow all through her life (204). This implies a marginalised location, which is further exacerbated by her inability to have steady relationships with men. However, as the play proceeds, we see Sereh slowly assuming control of the direction of the conversations, directing her brother and nephew onto the path of healing and forgiveness. She emerges as the Wise Woman, who is able to assign a spiritual import to the process of making
pottery, or the purpose of making winter counts. At the beginning of the play, Segwohi reduces her to an insignificant position and considers her an eavesdropper. Further, when she narrates her dream, his statement – “The Spirits visit a woman in such a way” (226) betrays a tinge of sarcasm fuelled by a patriarchal relegation of women to domestic chores rather than Spirit related matters.

However, the dream remains significant in two ways. Firstly, it metaphorically captures the process of systematic colonial subjugation that people like Segwohi, Sereh and Peyto had experienced. The slaughter house that Sereh sees in her dream is “presided over by the wagon”, which symbolizes the onslaught of the colonial aggressor. Secondly, the dream enables her to visualize Peyto as a seer. In such a vast slaughter house, she hears Peyto’s cry as a representative voice of an entire generation which witnesses the sociocultural onslaught engendered by colonial subjugation. In her conception, Peyto is actually a seer, albeit in a relocated context. However, she stresses the fact that he needs support by underlining the point that she had seen Peyto crying alone. It can be concluded that Sereh’s source of empowerment lies in looking for meaning in both the familiar and the unfamiliar aspects of life. An example of the first is her search for meaning in the acts of making pottery, and an example of the second is the interpretation that she gives in what she construes to be a dream.

Paula Gunn Allen makes an important point while discussing the position of the “Woman” in the Native American culture. The Native American Woman did not essentially function only as a fertility goddess but also as the spirit that informs right balance, right harmony, which in turn orders all relationships in conformity with law (14). Native American women, through their chants, rituals, activities and visions, could
access the world of spirits. This implied that while they were capable of communicating with supernatural beings, they could also function as Medicine Women, engendering healing through rites, rituals and chants. Within the sociocultural matrix, they often occupied exalted positions like that of the Medicine Woman. However, the patriarchal influence of the colonizers functioned at a fundamental level to deny such status to women. Gunn Allen locates such processes of subjugation to the Puritan, Catholic and Quaker and other Christian missionaries who made every effort to remove the gynocratic social system that was at the heart of the Native American society.

Another effect of the patriarchal influence was that the Native American women were marginalised to such a position that they were denied any access to their own sociocultural heritage, which essentially functioned as a source of dynamic images and role models like the Old Spider Woman, Corn Woman, Thought Woman.4 Such models of womanhood were defined by their spiritual power and their ability to function as mediums between the spirit world and the world of humankind. However, the prototype instilled and reinforced in the female seminaries approximated to that of the passive Madonna5. For example, the first thing that Weebjob remembers about Sweet Grass while at the Indian Female Seminary was her passivity. He says, “She would hardly look at me, much less speak anything to me” (31). Segwohi questions his sister’s ability to communicate with the Spirits and Eli in Stick Horse mocks Quannah by derisively addressing her as a “medicine woman” (118).

Another aspect which worked to undermine the spiritual power of Native American Women was the basic conception of spirituality itself. For example, the Cherokee spiritual world encompassed the entire creation and was not confined to a
single image or a deity. Their spirituality worked more through the personification of the natural phenomena which were often assigned religious significance. However, when schooled in seminaries where the idea of God was often reduced to a tangible form and the concept of sin and punishment became a stable construct, women had to contend with walking the middle path between the idea of faith as reinforced by the formalized Christian models and the fragmented Native American consciousness. Memela in *Salvage* is at one extreme since she finds an answer to her personal crisis in the model of forgiveness as personified by Jesus Christ at a larger level, and by Stover’s wife at a localized level. Such ambivalence finds an expression in *Jumpkiss* as well, where the narrative voice is engaged in a dynamic interplay of the Christian and the Native American elements of sin and punishment. In terms of the interstitial perspective which Glancy presents, we find that her women access their spiritual power in a subversive context. Such attempts to access spiritual power, while indicating their ability to comprehend their marginalised location, are representative of their efforts at cultural persistence. In Glancy’s plays, attempts to access the spiritual power can be analysed from the following perspectives: contextual recasting of traditional myths, images and legends, animal transformations and the process of creating a “reinvented oral tradition”.

In *The Lesser Wars*, when the act of hysterectomy is seen vis-à-vis the tradition of the War Woman in the Native American context, it can be discerned that Glancy is hinting at the larger issues of exercising power in the context of relationships. There are a few significant aspects of the War Woman tradition, as discussed by Gunn Allen with reference to the Keres which can be correlated to Tecoyo’s location. The stories of the twin sisters Uretsete and Naotsete in the Keres mythology, who were sung into life by the
Thought Woman, generally involve the transformation of Uretsete into a male. This aspect is obvious in Tecoyo’s efforts to subsume her identity within that of her male counterpart, Coytoe. Further, the Keres warfare involved the use of ritual institutions to deal with antagonism between people and groups, an aspect which can be extended to most of the Native American tribes. In the play, such an institution operates with reference to the dried bear ovaries, which serve to resist the idea of motherhood and instead embrace the tradition of the Warrhameh. Tecoyo describes the significance of her dried bear ovaries as follows: “The part of me that wants to remain barren. The part of me that the ‘Warrhameh’ – the war woman who wears the ovaries against conception. I don’t really want to be pregnant. The terrible responsibility, you know. It’s the male in me. I guess” (151).

The phrase ‘terrible responsibility’ hints at the relocated context in which Tecoyo has to assert her power by giving up a part of her identity. While her composition “My Child” expresses her desire to bear a child, the dried bear ovaries at her waist represent the vision of the Warrhameh. Moreover, in her context as a single woman, motherhood indeed becomes a terrible responsibility since she would not receive any child support. However, it is also crucial to consider that the politics in such a decision revolve around her undeclared intention of re-scripting a new aspect of her identity, which is not contingent on childbearing. In fact, she hints at her marginalised location by describing herself as part of the “Flat Earth Society”. She says:

I belong to the Flat Earth Society.

It’s a group for women.

It’s what men have always done to us.
Saying we’ll fall off if we go too far.

Maybe that’s where my cabin is –

The place I’ve always dreamed of (160).

The “Flat Earth Society” essentially functions as a metaphor for the limitations imposed upon women in terms of a vision quest. By choosing to model herself after the image of Warrhameh, she can move to a location wherein she would not be confined by such limitations. Therefore, while fighting the war of relationships, the ritual act of obliterating herself functions as an act of empowerment so that the woman can emerge as a survivor.

The integration of the figure of Coyote, the shape-changer, is also significant from the perspective of androgyny which Glancy hints at in the play. To emerge as a survivor, Tecoyo has to combine her identity with that of Coytoe, who denies her the dream of motherhood. In a symbolic gesture, he pulls away her foetus and guillotines it. What he has actually done is to root out the idea of motherhood, a vision that Tecoyo would never achieve, since it is inconsistent with her quest for survival. To function as the Warrhameh in a relocated context, and to discover the New World of barrenness she has to give up herself to become one with Coytoe.

Gunn Allen describes the Grandmother(s) as the Old Spiderwoman figure, who weaves together everything into an interconnection (11). The Grandmother(s) is also responsible for the creation of the firmament, the earth and all the spirit beings in it, by thinking into being. The Grandmother in *The Woman who was a Red Deer*, performs a similar role, albeit in a relocated context. She uses the Ahw’uste as the vital tool which enables her to connect to the world beyond the “tacky world” (15). However, in a frame
of a dialogic mediation, she encounters opposition in the form of the Girl who consistently questions the presence of the Ahw’uste. Located in a liminal space between her Native American antecedents and Christianity, the Girl is able to integrate only the seeable aspect of the world into her consciousness.

It can be observed that myth of Ahw’uste does not lend itself to a particularized description either for the Grandmother or the Girl. The belief in the Spirit rests upon a personalized interpretation which is a matter of faith. In the process of such questioning, the marginalised status of the Grandmother and the Girl are revealed. While the Grandmother had to struggle with a life in which she could not think of wanting love (16), the Girl faces an economic crisis after the loss of her job, in addition to experiencing only ephemeral ideas of love. Uniting both the Grandmother and the Girl is their search for spiritual fulfillment. However, while the Grandmother chooses to wait like the maple tree, the Girl tries to find solace in temporary relationships.

While recognizing her marginalised location and the limited visibility of the Spirits in her life, the Grandmother tries to look for connections and correlations in the world of Nature. She uses the metaphor of the maple tree waiting for its red leaves and she says, “We’re the tree waiting for the red leaves. We count on what’s not there as though it is because the maple has red leaves – only you can’t always see them” (12). Hence, to connect with the Spirit World, there is a need to presuppose and believe in a connection between the physical, natural and the Spirit world. Naturally, the Girl has trouble accepting such an idea since she subscribes to the concept of locating Jesus in the form of “dudes on the highway” who promise her only a limited idea of love. Being schooled in the ways of Christianity, she emerges as a representative of Western
Materialism as opposed to the Native American sense of spirituality represented by her Grandmother. As they try to interpret and accommodate the myth of Ahw’uste to their marginalised location, they are in fact engaged in a process of cultural translation to empower themselves spiritually. The myth and the accompanying idea of deer dress and deer dance become fluid constructs which are culturally translated into the contextual requirements for the Grandmother and the Girl so that they can arrive at a location for survival. Such a perspective is supported by the final narration of her job interviews by the Girl. She says:

So I told ‘em at my first job interview – no, I hadn’t worked that kind of machine – but I could learn.

I told ‘em them at my second interview the same thing –

I told ‘em at the third –

At the fourth I told ‘em –

My grandmother was a deer. I could see her change before my eyes. She caused stories to happen. That’s how I knew she could be a deer. (18)

While at the first interview the Girl appears to be willing to learn the machine, an aspect which hints at her encounters with the contact culture, by the fourth interview, she affirms by her Native American roots by talking about her grandmother. This becomes a process of cultural translation. While the image offered by Western materialism is that of the static machine, her Native American culture offers her the dynamic Ah’wuste.

The power of the Native American transformation myths, as discussed by Richard and Judy Dockerey Young lies in their ability to bring about new transformations. Animal transformations speak to a new generation of listeners and empower it with the
means to bring about transformation in itself (11). This implies that transformation is a
dynamic process which depends upon the participation of the listener or the subject, in a
process that would empower them to see beyond the seeable and connect the physical to
the natural and thereby the spirit world. In her interview to Jennifer Andrews, Glancy
asserts her belief in animal transformations and extends it to the Biblical story of
Neduchadnezzar\textsuperscript{6} as well. She describes such transformations, which are an accepted
construct in Native American mythology, as magic performed by “conjurers and
magicians”. It is indeed significant that Glancy permits such animal transformations to
her women characters. In \textit{Mother of Mosquitos}, the concepts of ‘woman’ and ‘animal’ are
intrinsically connected to the aspect of the life-sustaining blood. The mosquito flies
beside the Woman because, as the Chorus says, “Her life’s in our blood” (275). As the
Woman steps into the underwater, she dons a fish-mask, and asks to be wrapped into the
seal-skin tunic. The process of transformation into the Mother of Mosquitoes turns out to
a spiritual way of empowering her sense of identity. The fish mask and the sealskin tunic,
in addition to the quest for driftwood are sourced in the Inuit culture.

Carl Waldman describes the contemporary Inuit life as one in which rifles and
shotguns work instead of harpoons and spears. People prefer power driven canvas canoes
instead of driftwood kayaks, and synthetic clothes instead of hand-made sealskin ones. A
similar context works with a subversive force in the play, as is evident in the following
utterances by the Chorus:

\begin{quote}
Make a fire from driftwood,

We tired of blubber-fire.

We tired of blubber. (276)
\end{quote}
To attain empowerment, the Woman has to reestablish the connection between her self and the natural world. When she locates the aspect of animal transformation within the limits of her persona as a life-sustaining woman, she is able to unlock the scope for “magic” to operate and thus, enable the perspective of looking beyond the visible and the familiar. Such a process necessarily involves the recognition of the role of the woman as the carrier of dreams and visions, but not a fertility goddess alone, as the following lines imply:

I become one with the mask,

Sweet mask

No childbirth pains.

No tattooing-needle in my face,

No soot-black thread drawn through my cheeks. (276)

Hence, by extension, Glancy is able to locate the play in the “Village of Ice in the Far North of the Imagination”, indicating that the process of making such complex associations is actually a powerplay that is taking place in the mind of the Woman, so that some sense of balance and harmony is restored in her living environment

In The Women Who Loved House Trailers, Oscar declares: “My mother was a wren. She made a nest from her anger and discontent” (23). In the Native American mythology, the wren is conceived of as a mysterious bird. By associating her mother with the wren, Oscar hints that through the very act of silencing, her mother had not been accessible to her. The imagery of an entrapped bird, suggests that the cause for the discontent could have been sustained repression by her husband. In fact, she says:
My father was a minister. If my mother spoke, he quoted the Bible. I will multiply your sorrow, Genesis 3:16.

She finally chirped from the little birdhouse of her head. (27)

The colonial impact of Christianity can be clearly discerned in the silencing of the woman. Her reported transformation into a wren probably enabled her to connect to the “magical” and hence empowered her spiritually. But Glancy locates such a transformation subversively because such a transformation isolated her from her children. Oscar plaintively asks: “Mother, why didn’t you listen? Why didn’t you open your wren-ears and hear? What did you have to chirp about?” (24)

At a later point in the play, we see such a transformation into a wren ironically appearing in the sculpt pieces of Oscar. While she names her sculpt piece as a “Wren w/2 half wings”, the Gallery advises her to de-wing the bird since it is too large for their space. This is similar to the status of a woman in the colonial context, since she has been denied access to the magical and the mysterious. While Oscar’s mother had suppressed her anger and discontentment, Oscar empowers herself by redirecting those emotions into her sculpt-pieces.

In some of the plays, Glancy hints at possibilities for animal transformations, though not clearly delineating them in the play itself. For instance, she says in the introduction to American Gypsy, “Peri and Frennie are sisters. Frennie’s name is also Chicken Baby, because sometimes there is a possibility of shape changing” (44). There is no actual instance in the play where the dramatist gives a clear indication about the shape changing of Frennie into a chicken. However, Frennie is seen dressed in chicken feathers,
wearing a cross on her back. The stage directions say that she is walking down a dirt road holding a sign – “They die so we can live” (81).

In the story “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”, Gabriel Garcia Marquez describes the human response to a phenomenon which is perceived to be unnatural and magical. An old man with enormous wings is confined to a chicken coop and becomes an overnight celebrity precisely because of his strangeness. The Old Man also emerges as a symbol of Christian apathy, as represented by the colonizers’ outlook on religion and spirituality. However, unlike the Old Man, Frennie appears empowered, albeit in a similar context. Her chicken feathers are representative of her connection to her spiritual world, which she can access whenever required. She also emerges as the representative Native American who has been pushed into the mode of migration through a gradual process of acculturation. Perhaps, in an indication of her empowered status, she is able to hit her ex-husband Reep, when he appears to threaten her peace. When she says: “You watch out for the chickens. They been heated up for so long, they’re mean” (81), she is in a way highlighting the plight of the Native Americans who have been confined to reservations and have lost access to their heritage and culture. This would explain the culture of violence, which eventually consumes Titomo’s life.

One of the ways in which Native American women maintained the life and stability of their people was by bearing responsibility for preserving and using the oral tradition. In fact, in many tribal systems, the ceremonial and ritual aspects of the oral tradition rested on female power (Gunn Allen 205) and hence, women were considered sacred. Glancy highlights the link between the oral tradition and the cultural sovereignty of people in her essay “The Nail-Down of Oral Tradition”. She says, “Oral tradition
carries the fire, the spirit of the people. It’s an invisible library. A personal and tribal identity. Without the definition of inner life that oral tradition gives, our people are open to a sense of purposelessness” (Claiming Breath 103). In The Woman Who Was A Red Deer, the Grandmother describes women as the “carriers of our stories and histories” (14). In The Women Who Loved House Trailers, Berta locates stories as the sources of love (35). In The Truth Teller, the Indian Woman says: “Truth is what we hear in our stories” (265). In the Mother of Mosquitos, stories are responsible for convincing the Woman about the underwater forest where she can find the driftwood.

Explaining the centrality of the individual voice to such a tradition, Glancy states in The Cold-and-Hunger Dance, “According to the oral tradition, I could speak with the trail of voices. I could talk with my own voice, and the way of my words could change the structure of the story. I could speak indirectly if I wanted to; talking about one thing while meaning another” (2). This explains the differing version of some stories and plays like Segwohi and The Women Who Loved House Trailers. The differing versions appear because the act of storying itself becomes an act of “gathering many voices to tell a story in many different ways” (The Cold and the Hunger Dance 9). Such differing versions necessarily involve perceptions which alter the consciousness of people, as is evidenced in The Women Who Loved House Trailers.

Glancy discusses another aspect of the oral tradition in her collection of essays, The West Pole. The oral tradition derives its power precisely from a responsible use of words, which had to be guarded. Hence, she says: “What you said could last for generations. Therefore you guarded your words. You made them count in the oral
tradition. You spoke them responsibly. You kept in mind what the speaker says affects the speaker as much as the spoken to” (67).

From this perspective, the oral tradition in Glancy’s plays works as an “invented tradition” (Krupat, *The Turn to the Native* 37). Though tribal stories and the practice of storytelling are central to her work, they function more as a context and hence bear influence on empowering her women. As a result of such an exercise, the following aspects of the storying process are obvious in Glancy’s plays: incorporation of the narrative storytelling into the dramatic action; multivocal authenticity giving way to a communal truth that must be constructed by actors and viewers beyond the world of the play (Stanlake 156); dramatization of the fluid boundaries between the past, the present and the future through an achronological rendering of time; and presenting alternate versions of history which serve to act as sources for empowerment.

Glancy incorporates the audience aspect of storytelling into the dramatic action, as is evidenced in the plays *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer* and *The Lesser Wars*. In the preface to *The Woman Who Was A Red Deer*, Glancy says that her intention was to capture the story not with a linear construct of conflict/resolution. She rather wanted to capture the story moving “like rain in a windshield. Between differing and unreliable experiences” (4). Hence, the story of the sighting of the Ahw’uste is incorporated into a monologue/dialogue mode. The primary audience for this story(s) is the Girl, who sometimes intrudes into the dramatic action of the play with her questions. Such questions force both the Grandmother and the Girl to reassess their modes of belief in the Ahw’uste. For example, in the following conversation, we can see how the process of assigning meaning to the Ahw’uste becomes a collaborative effort:
GIRL. Have you heard of the Ahw’uste?

GRANDMOTHER. I have, but I’ve forgotten.

GIRL. They said they fed her.

GRANDMOTHER. Yes, they did.

GIRL. What was she?

GRANDMOTHER. I don’t know.

GIRL. A deer?

GRANDMOTHER. Yes, a deer. A small deer.

GIRL. She lived in the house, didn’t she?

GRANDMOTHER. Yes, she did. She was small. (3)

It can be observed that the construction of the meaning of Ahw’uste becomes a collaborative exercise, with the Girl supplying the relevant information to which the Grandmother adds further details based on her own encounters with the myth. On the face of it, such exchanges seem to involve facts and perceptions. However, it can also be sensed that, albeit the difference in their ages, the Grandmother and the Girl are trying to establish points of connection, which will in turn function as a source of cultural empowerment. Hence, the necessary drama is created through the interrogative model of searching for answers.

The monologues express the frustrations which the characters experience with the myth of the Ahw’uste. For example, the Girl confesses her mistake of believing that a “dude on the highway” would be her liberating spirit. The Grandmother confesses that the spirits did not always help out in her life. Hence, the reference to the spirit deer is wound with irony. Though much of the dramatic action is sourced from the contexts in
which the myth is invoked, the contexts themselves work in the background, leaving the ground for the power play to operate between the Grandmother and the Girl.

Glancy uses the Coyote tradition of the Native American stories in *The Lesser Wars* to portray the contradictions experienced by Tecoyo regarding her sense of identity. In addition to this tradition, the story of Columbus which operates in the background defines much of Tecoyo’s ironical responses to the situations dealing with relationships and her impending hysterectomy. In fact, Glancy strikes at a comparison between Columbus’ journey to the New World and Tecoyo’s journey towards barrenness. Tecoyo describes his journey towards the New World as his “vision quest in the wilderness of the waves” (156). Hinting at a correlation of the ambiguities, doubts and confusion that must have assailed Columbus on such a voyage, she describes such a vision quest as a “roller-coaster ride”. However, she also manages to approximate herself to the identity of a seeker in search of something, when she says, “This’s MY story” (156).

In a sense, the figure of Columbus works as a point of connection, typified by the longing to belong to something despite the sense of marginalization which engulfs the characters in the play. While describing Columbus as the “first feminist”, Glancy states that he is the forerunner, archetype of the woman who has shed her boundaries. (*The West Pole* 120) In that sense, he becomes a useful model for Tecoyo, who parallels her journey towards becoming the Warrhameh to his journey towards the discovery of the East. Since Columbus wanted to explore beyond what was considered in those days to be the edge of the earth, Tecoyo finds a suitable objective correlative in the figure of Columbus, especially since such an exercise holds a lot of implications for questions regarding faith and spirituality. In a way, her hysterectomy can also be considered as her
willingness to take risk with her child-bearing abilities, and its attendant implications on questions regarding spirituality.

But such a journey is fraught with its own ironies. Columbus’ discovery meant that the Old Land was wiped out by disease, dissolution and the loss of the cultural and spiritual elements of life. (*The West Pole* 121) Similarly, Tecoyo’s quest for love and identity in a relationship has led her to a denial of her own identity, symbolized by the final fall of the guillotine. (*The Lesser Wars* 182) In such a context, the trickster story of maiming one’s self actually functions as a source of empowerment because the play is then pushed into the subconscious mode as we realize that Coytoe and Tecoyo are two aspects of the same personality.

One of the aspects discussed by Stanlake, with reference to Native American theatre, is the presence of a multivocal authenticity which gives way to a communal truth that must be constructed by actors and viewers beyond the world of the play (156). This is apparent through the gathering of various, and often contradictory perspectives expressed through Native stories. Glancy moves a step forward in search of a communal truth which would empower her women characters and tries to integrate diverse perspectives on stories drawn from other cultures and religions as well. For instance, there is only one voice that operates as the narrator in *The Toad Should Have a Bite*. The narrator is a single woman in her fifties, who is on a trip to China. However, the multivocal authenticity operates in terms of the variations in the story of Chang’e, which give way to the idea that meaning is constructed by the viewer or the person experiencing the event. Hence, the process of connecting to the spiritual becomes an insurgent act of cultural translation because the subjects involved have their own personalized method of
responding to the idea of subjugation and control. Such a position adopted by the author is in tune with the idea of “conflation of perspectives” since it engenders a plurality of meaning, and hence implies a movement to a vantage position of understanding. The play begins with the following lines: “There’s no writing on the Great Wall of China. The Wall of China has no graffiti. This is my writing on the wall” (*The Toad* 294).

The Great Wall of China becomes a dynamic image which operates both as a historical construct and a metaphor with various levels of signification implying security and subjugation. The first two lines indicate the position held by authority whereas the third line indicates how the author has made inroads into that position, faintly hinting at the idea of colonial subjugation. Such a stand is further substantiated by the lines that follow: “Over the years, peasants have taken stones from the Wall to build their houses and outbuildings, their own little walls” (sic) (194).

The revolt by the marginalised peasants against the idea of authority and control is indicated by the act of appropriating parts of the Wall to build individual domiciles thereby implying that creation becomes an insurgent act. By extension, creation of meaning as well becomes an insurgent act. The author narrates the story of Chang’e who had been separated from her husband through the pill of immortality. The story that the tour guide narrates becomes a perfect objective correlative for the narrator’s status as a single woman. She says, ‘I thought about the life I live on the moon – when I am riding on a tour bus in China full of people in evening traffic on the longest street, named Everlasting Peace’ (195). This perspective integrates the aspect of empowerment in the sense that the narrator doesn’t see the need to exist within the confines of a relationship. It is a matter of personal choice, a point that is further illustrated by the extended
correlation of Chang’e to Eve. Both had chosen not to seek the paradise, but their own will which is not circumscribed by patriarchal notions of control. So Chang’e by taking the pill of immortality and Eve by choosing to partake of the forbidden fruit, were in a sense, role models for empowerment of women.

Into this matrix, the narrator introduces the voice of the archer Hou Yi, who had earned the pill of immortality by shooting the ten suns. According to the story, he often stood looking at the moon, under the assumption that Chang’e had gone to seek her own world. The narrator’s voice correlates this to the idea of love when she compares love to a forbidden city where no one should be allowed. Hence, it is difficult to guess whether Hou Yi longed for his wife or for the immortality that had been promised to him. Just like in the Christian story of Eve, Chang’e is assigned the negative role of partaking of the fruit of immortality. However, in a marginalised context unlike Adam and Eve, Hou Yi and Chang’e are condemned to a life of loneliness precisely because they choose to exercise their choice.

Hence, there are four voices operating in the story, as it appears in the play – the voice of the tour guide, the voice of the narrator, the voice of Chang’e (representative woman) and the voice of Hou Yi (representative man). The communal truth that emerges from the powerplay can be discerned from the attempts of the narrator to engender points of connection by overriding those aspects which create the sense of loneliness in the first place. At a communal level, she refers to the Chinese practice of making small white cakes on the night of the Autumn Festival. While extending the persona of Chang’e to encompass the whole moon, she also talks about the similarities between the toad and the
moon. She says, “The toad is another name for the moon – because the full moon is speckled or mottled as a toad’s back” (199).

It is only through a ritual act of the toad partaking of the cakes that points of connection can be established between Chang’e and the world. In an act infused with ritual and cultural meaning, the narrator introduces a new voice, that of the marginalised woman who has often been silenced, through the practice of binding her feet with lily shoes and who has often been condemned to a life of cruelty, hard work and misery. (195)

The dramatization of fluid boundaries is essentially typified by the presence of characters who are able to look beyond boundaries, and an achronological rendering of time so that the narrative pattern in the play does not have a clear beginning, middle or an end. Lody in *Bull Star*, is an example of a character who is able to look beyond boundaries. There are enough hints provided to suggest that she had suffered child abuse at the hands of her alcoholic mother (162), which must have had a significant impact on her conception of motherhood. However, the meaning of abuse assumes new dimensions, when Jack convinces Cicero to use Lody for “spooking” Cree’s father (164). Though Cicero initially resists the idea, he plays along, making inroads into Lody’s world of Baby Hare, Taurus and the stars. He tries to convince her by equalizing the image of the stars with the selling of the depot. This is because of the assumption that she is probably retarded, and would understand the act of deceit only in terms of the story of the stars and the Bull Star which she has woven for her own survival. However, as Cicero admits, Lody speaks as if she has the right sense to understand the economic insecurities which Jack and Cree are facing. She has empowered herself with the virtue of understanding,
though she weaves the story about Baby Hare and the Bull Star for her own survival. In that sense, she has crossed the boundary between the reality and the make-believe by allowing for a conflation of perspectives between both the worlds.

The achronological rendering of time is sourced in the story weaving tradition which was a standard strategy while performing oral narratives. By making time achronological in her plays, Glancy does not rely on conflict, crisis and resolution, but rather on the possibilities of relating events and experiences to one another. (Gunn Allen, 59) This paves the way for the spiritual empowerment of the women by releasing a network of possibilities for interconnection between the events, experiences and perceptions. For example, Birgit Dawes comments that working with “mixed media” on seven textual “movable plates”, while trying to capture the image of rain on a windshield, reflects the multidimensionality of aesthetic experience in Jump Kiss (87). The play seems to have been set in a state of suspended animation, enabling the narrative voice to indulge in a “recovery of events and experiences and relationships for the purpose of understanding what has passed” (87). There is no clear indication about the time aspect, though it is possible to figure out that the narrative voice belongs to a single, middle-aged woman (87).

Such a condition of achronological sense of time permits the reading of the play on various levels. While at one level, it can be read as an exploration of spiritual crisis in the face of sociocultural encounters engendered by the colonial contact, it can also be read as a search for the definition of self in terms of relationships. The play can be performed in any order of the sections, since there is no perceptible conflict or confrontation that holds the play at the centre.
A similar strategy is also at work in *The Women Who Loved House Trailers* and *Mother of Mosquitos*, where chronological sense of action is conspicuous by its absence. Instead, the sense of time in the plays is ordered more by a series of connections and interconnections between the personal and the spiritual, within the framework of the sociocultural context in which the characters are placed. While the *Mother of Mosquitos* deals with the construction of the idea of the mosquito mask at a metaphorical level, the women in *The Women Who Loved House Trailers*, are engaged in a deep rumination of their own migratory status, as evinced by their locational instability. We can conclude that the achronological sense of time functions more in a locational sense, sometimes permitting the characters to make precisely those connections which would serve as a source of creative empowerment.

Glancy once stated that she conceives of history as an “unrolling of many scrolls, going back and receiving what was there but had not a voice” (*Conversation* 7). The Native American woman in Glancy’s plays has been doubly silenced by years spent in the reservation and the reformatory, and the sustained suppression in the sociocultural context. She often embarks on a journey to go back and retrieve “what was there but had not a voice”. Her voice remains instrumental in the formation of an alternate history which is a significant process of cultural and religious empowerment. While this has a due impact on the cultural persistence often displayed by Glancy’s women characters, history becomes a localized and personalized construct thereby engendering a transformation from “history” to “his/her story”. Therefore, the oral stories become crucial markers for the creation of the alternate history which accommodates the idea of survivance. For example, in *The Truth Teller*, the Indian Woman questions her husband
‘How can anyone survive without stories?’ (259) In *The Lesser Wars*, Tecoyo is a school teacher who manages to conflate the ideas of “history” and “my story”. She says: ‘Let me tell my story, I teach history remember?’ (156) Her story is intertwined with the vision quest of Columbus who, in her conception of things, had engaged on a vision quest to find a new world. This corresponds to her idea of finding a new world in her alternative identity as the barren ‘Warrhameh.’ Within such a comparison, the three ships in search of the new world correspond to three directions in search of the fourth, typified in turn by the movements of the fox trot, which silently exerts a metaphorical import in the background. Just like how Columbus had taken risk with his vision of the new world, Tecoyo has to take risk in her new relationship with Coytoe. So her story of her lesser wars with Coytoe corresponds to the larger history of Columbus’ voyage to the Americas, albeit infused with the vision-quest of a new world.

*The Truth Teller*, set in Circa 1800, shows the Indian Woman engaging in the processes of cultural persistence, when she insists that her half-breed husband should dream a name for their baby. Her attitude towards the colonizers is typified by her constant questioning of her husband who works for them. She asks him, “How can you guide these white soldiers? It’s like leading a storm to our doors” (257). On one hand she is able to visualize the tragic vision of the future, engendered by cultural contact, especially when she is told that the colonizers don’t talk to their ancestors, and that they work their way around their land with the limited idea of maps. These are the parameters which reflect that the colonizers do not have a vision. She emerges as a figure of cultural persistence, when she insists that her husband dream a name for her son, while acknowledging the reality that her son may have to walk the way between the two worlds.
– his inherited world and the world of the colonizers. The Indian Woman conceives of stories as the perfect propagators of cultural persistence. She emerges as the powerful woman, who scripts her own voice, against a larger history of cultural penetration by the colonizers.

From the above discussion, we can discern that the journey towards “ani-yun-wiyu’, in Glancy’s plays is a spiritually intense quest, often influenced by the sociocultural contradictions which define the locational space of Glancy’s characters. Given their marginalised location, the significant position occupied by Glancy’s women characters emerges from their responses to the sociocultural encounters. Such responses are contingent on their spirit of survival which is in turn determined by their ability to connect the personal and the spiritual. Glancy’s women are powerful in their own right, because the dramatist rarely assigns a victimized status to them.9 Right from Sweet Potato in Weebjob who asserts her right to marry a man of her choice, to the empowered narrative voice in The Toad Should Have a Bite, women exercise a choice, or participate in rituals and storying towards the creation of a personalized sense of meaning. We witness them as empowered individuals rather than victimized subjects. In the process, they discover their voice, albeit their marginalised status. When considered in this light, Glancy’s methodology of locating her women characters invites a comparison with the work of the other American women playwrights, most of them who had similar concerns of empowering their women characters with the knowledge of culture, history and sometimes spirituality as well, an aspect which will be discussed in the next chapter.
Notes

1. Associated with the second and the third waves of feminism, possible reason for the popularity of feminist theatre groups.

2. This enables us to see identity not as an absolute or an essence, but as a fluid site which can be understood differently depending on its vantage point of formations and functions.

3. Bhabha opines that the borderline work of culture demands an encounter with newness which is not a part of the continuum of the past and the present. Such works renew the past, refiguring it as a contingent in-between space, which innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. (*The Location of Culture* 10)

4. Old Spider Woman, Corn Woman and Thought Woman are aspects of what Gunn Allen describes as the “quintessential spirit…that pervades everything” (*The Sacred Hoop* 13). The implication is clearly on the active role played by the Woman in the process of creation. Such descriptions ensure that the role of women is not restricted to reproductive aspects alone but also to the preservation of right balance and harmony.

5. Allen raises this point in *The Sacred Hoop* (44).

6. Glancy refers to the story of the Babylonian king Neduchadnezzar, who commended himself on the beauty of his city Babylon. According to the Bible, he was struck down by the Lord and cursed to live like an animal for seven years.
7. According to a Senecan legend, when stunned with pain, the wren had transformed into a man to avoid capture.

8. There is a spiritual angle to the achronological aspect of time. Gunn Allen says in her essay ‘The Ceremonial Motion of Indian Time’ that while chronological time structuring promotes and supports an industrial time sense with its attendant implications, the achronological sense of time results from tribal beliefs about the nature of reality and beliefs based on ceremonial understandings (149).

9. Exception to this is Halfact where there is enough suggested in the play to conclude that the Girl has been and will continue to be abused.
Works Cited


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